



# BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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August 13, 1973

## Earl Harding Dies of Heart Attack

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Earl O. Harding, 61, executive secretary of the Missouri Baptist Convention since 1954, died of a heart attack here August 12.

Harding was at home recuperating from an attack which hospitalized him in early July. He was rushed to a hospital but died within a few hours. A similar attack had occurred in 1963.

Memorial services were scheduled for him here and at Warrensburg, Mo., August 15.

Harding had been pastor at Lee's Summit, Warrensburg, and Joplin, Mo.

He is survived by his wife and one son, James Earl.

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## The Moral Implications of the Watergate Affair

8/13/73

By Brooks Hays

It is appropriate for churchmen to speak of public morals. While the church cannot claim a monopoly on moral influences, we can invoke history to confirm that, without the church, our American political institutions would be quite different. There are moral men outside the church, of course, and even religious men outside the church, but the church has been the conduit for the Judeo-Christian morality which underlies our culture.

Our forebears, determined to sever ties to tyrannical forms, left something behind to come to these western shores, but they also brought something with them. They brought their Biblical faith, the faith which has sustained precious values, many of which have to do with our politics.

These values have been such a natural part of our daily lives that we experience a shock when we find a few men in power displaying an indifference to them and others a defiance of them. The undeniable facts associated with the Watergate experience should and do create a concern that, unchecked and uncorrected, the immoral political practices that are now known will erode these values and permanently damage the political structure in which these values have been conserved.

It is not chauvinism to speak of a special concern for these spiritual values which underlie the American political system.

What does this have to do with Watergate? Basically, it was distrust, even contempt, for popular rule and judgments that led to the criminal actions that were finally revealed in pleas of guilty and jury convictions for the night-time burglaries and the invasions of opponents' rights of privacy. Related to these overt acts were other depredations which I shall mention later.

The subversion of our political procedures was unprecedented. There have been efforts in every presidential campaign to learn as much as possible of the opposition tactics but generally these were rather innocent and no one can point to a single event in political history to support the claim that "it goes on all the time."

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Let me add, however, that most of the public men I know are free from the condemnation of Henry Stimson, one of our greatest public servants. "Cynicism," he said, "is the only deadly sin."

The essential immorality of these activities is their subversive character. Democracy is primarily a process, and men who resort to crime to subvert it commit an assault upon the electorate--upon us all.

The betrayal of these responsibilities by party functionaries is just as shocking as if committed by occupants of public office.

I stress the point that my approach is non-partisan. Unfortunately, this is necessary when judgments regarding actions by members of another political party are expressed. I would never assert that "our morals," meaning Democratic morals, are better than "their morals," meaning Republican morals, and referring to both in their corporate character.

And this is not to suggest that partisanship is always an unworthy attribute. In a political forum, critical judgments could well be considered the normal function of "the loyal opposition." Truth itself may on occasion be clearly partisan. It is the morality of results, not the morality of motive, that should engage the electorate in this tragic circumstance.

I believe that I may say, however, that while a loyal party man, I would certainly avoid partisanship where basic morals are involved. I could cite, for example, the comment of a lady in Arkansas who said during the Little Rock school crisis. "I voted for Ike and Brooks--I never split a ticket." President Eisenhower and I were on the same side of a moral issue.

The remedy for Watergate is three pronged--the first two, judicial and legislative, are proceeding in traditional fashion but the third remedy, the political one, presents problems. In this area we are all challenged. Leadership is a vital part of the problem of making secure the moral base for a good and a stable society. "If the gold rusts, how can the iron be saved?" asked Chaucer. A second question follows. "If the gold does not rust, can the iron even then be saved?" Madison would say in the 20th century, as he said in the 18th, "without popular education, popular government will be a farce or a tragedy, conceivably both." It then follows that the truth must be revealed and disseminated and respected. If we are fearful of the results of a search for truth we cannot as a nation climb to a finer moral posture.

One way of posing our national problem (considering now, not the sinfulness of the seven wrongdoers, and their accomplices, if any) is to point out that we have not yet learned to live with affluence. This human frailty was also contemplated by the early saints. "Love of money is the root of all kinds of evil," said Paul.

And at least some of the Committee must have seen that there was dubiousness in a forty million dollar campaign budget not only from a practical point of view but also from a moral stance. Republican members of Congress generally supported legislation, modest though it was, to improve procedures.

This system by which presidents and congresses are chosen is a valuable heritage. It must be guarded. New legislation will be required. More important, however, is an awakened public conscience and a determination to do all things that will make a recurrence of Watergate impossible.

Looking at the moral aspects of Watergate one must inevitably turn to theology for the needed words. Love is such a word. The fact is inescapable that those who committed the Watergate offenses were not cultivating a love of people and the peoples' system for electing their president, although that quality is basic for all who function as a part of the election machinery.

Lincoln Steffans, known in his time (50 years ago) as a "muckraker" because he exposed corruption, was once asked by a big city boss, "Why have you been so critical of me?" Steffans replied, "Because you have not been loyal." "But," replied the troubled man, "No one has been more loyal to friends than I"--"Oh, yes, to your allies, but your loyalty to the people has been betrayed. You were indebted to them, not these so-called friends, for your power, and you promised them you would be loyal, but you sacrificed their interests for your henchmen and those in your inner circle--you forgot the people."

To love people means one will resist temptations to promote a special interest which conflicts with their general interests. This quality of love and concern (the Greeks called it *philos* or *agape*) is essential to the success of the Senate's Investigation. Without it, there could be no comprehensive judicial probing of the complicated facts.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Mr. Hays is a former congressman from Arkansas and was a special assistant to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He was president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1958 and 1959.

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