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Move Toward Adult Baptism Seen Among Some Catholics

By Tracy Early
for Baptist Press

A startling new possibility for Baptist-Catholic dialogue has emerged from the liturgical renewal stimulated by Vatican II.

Many of the leading liturgical specialists of the Catholic Church are engaged in a movement to make adult rather than infant baptism the standard Catholic practice.

These Catholics also believe immersion is the preferable form of baptism and hold that baptism should be performed in the context of congregational worship, rather than privately as has been common in the Catholic Church.

Though this position has not yet received any official support from the Catholic heirarchy, it is being adopted by significant numbers of Catholic liturgists both in the United States and in Western Europe, according to John Gallen, S.J., one of those leading in the new school of thought.

Gallen, a 41-year-old native of Philadelphia and a member of the Jesuit order since 1950, is associate professor of pastoral theology at the Jesuits' Woodstock College (a seminary). He also leads an avant garde program of Sunday masses and other worship services sponsored by the Woodstock Jesuit community.

In an interview at the school's quarters in the Interchurch Center, New York, he recalled that new ideas on baptism were just beginning to be discussed when he did his doctoral studies at a liturgical institute at the (Catholic) University of Trier, Germany. Now he finds that his position is widely shared in liturgical circles.

At a Scottsdale, Ariz., conference Gallen directed for U.S. liturgists last December, a discussion group focusing on baptism unanimously adopted a statement that declared, "Within the economy of the sacraments, adult initiation should be the practical norm."

In addition to Gallen, those endorsing this view included such Catholics as Aidan Kavanaugh, a Benedictine priest who is director of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame (Ind.); Aelred Tegels, a Benedictine priest who is editor of the magazine Worship, and Robert Hovde, a priest from the Liturgical Conference, a Catholic agency in Washington, D.C.

Some non-Catholics attended the conference, and those approving the baptism statement included Hans C. Boehringer, a Missouri Synod Lutheran who is director of a program in liturgical studies at Valparaiso (Ind.) University, and Daniel Stevick, an Episcopalian from the Philadelphia Divinity School.

Though this group thinks adult baptism should be the norm, it does not rule out all infant baptism. However, an even wider group would discourage infant baptism, Gallen notes, in cases where parents show no serious intention of bringing up their children in the Christian faith.

Baptism of infants is defensible, Gallen says, as "a sign of the initiative of God's love." He also believes that there is a sense in which even an infant has "experience of God's presence" that on the infant level might be called faith. So he does not think "believer's baptism" has to mean adult baptism exclusively.

But Gallen says adult baptism was originally the norm, with infant baptism as an exception, and he contends "it is not good to develop a theology of baptism out of what was an exceptional practice."

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The new thinking of Catholics on baptism, Gallen says, did not come from any external influences such as discussions with Baptists or reading the Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who also opposed infant baptism.

Rather, it developed, he says, as Catholic liturgical scholars dug further back into their own tradition, studying more of the ancient liturgical texts and the New Testament.

"Knowing the liturgical tradition," he says, "we know that the Christian initiation liturgy was not originally constructed to deal with infants. It had a different orientation."

As for the mode of baptism, Gallen does not think immersion is the only possible form, but he considers it preferable as a symbol of purification and of death and resurrection.

If infants are baptized, he believes they too should be immersed, as in Eastern Orthodoxy. "Immersion has always been an option in the Roman liturgy, and though rarely practiced, never completely died out," he says.

"It is now being resumed in the West, and more and more infants are being baptized by immersion." Still, it is by no means common, he adds.

As is also the case among the Eastern Orthodox, Gallen contends that confirmation and the first reception of communion (the Eucharist) should be a part of baptism, whether infant or adult, rather than coming at separate, later times.

Believing that infant baptism is valid, Gallen opposes the common Baptist practice of administering adult baptism to someone who was baptized in infancy. Gallen himself received infant baptism, and though he feels he has missed something by not having it as a conscious experience, he does not intend to seek adult baptism.

Where else would he disagree with Baptists in a dialogue--which he says he would welcome--on baptism? There would be a divergence, he says, if a Baptist spoke of baptism as "only" a symbol, or as a "mere" symbol.

Setting aside the traditional argument over whether baptism is a symbol or a sacrament, he uses the terms "sign," "symbol" and "sacrament" virtually as synonyms. A symbol both expresses an experience and enlarges it, he says.

Baptism, Gallen believes, should not be a private ceremony, but part of a worship service. In that context, he says, baptism is a form of prayer in which a person's faith experience is not only acted out in ritual but also deepened and enlarged.

"I would disagree with Baptists," he says, "whenever baptism was not presented and understood as an authentic sign of God's active presence."

Though the new attitudes toward baptism have made extensive inroads in Catholic thinking, Gallen does not expect any immediate revolution in Catholic practice. Nor does he think a priest who agrees with this line of thought should try to pressure Catholics who are not prepared for it into accepting immediate changes.

But he is optimistic about the chances that the new approach will prevail over a period of time. During Lent he presented his ideas to a group of lay Catholics and nuns at a series of classes he gave after the Sunday mass of the Woodstock Jesuits, and he found the group open and responsive.

The baptism statement adopted at the Arizona conference will be included in an article by Gallen that is scheduled for publication in the June issue of the scholarly Catholic journal Theological Studies.

The next step, he says, is to get Catholic theologians specializing in dogmatics and catechetics to discuss the approach being presented by the liturgists.

"With their cooperation," Gallen says, "there is substantial reason to think it will succeed. But it will not be overnight." (BP)

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Tracy Early is a freelance writer working in New York City. This article was prepared specially for Baptist Press.

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April 22, 1974

Survey Shows Most Southern Baptist Pastors Attended College

By Toby Druin

ATLANTA (BP)--A recent study of the educational attainment of Southern Baptist pastors reveals 69.3 per cent have either attended college or completed college or seminary training and 71.5 per cent of those who attended college went to a Baptist institution.

The study report was released by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's department of survey and special studies on a survey requested by the board's department of rural-urban missions and the Education Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The report is available on request from either Larry Bryson, director of the department of rural-urban missions, or Ben C. Fisher, executive secretary of the Education Commission.

The complete report is also printed in the March-April issue of the Southern Baptist Educator, published by the Education Commission.

The survey was conducted in 1973 through a mail questionnaire to some 750 superintendents of missions serving 1,089 associations of Baptist churches, covering all areas except Alaska, Hawaii and District of Columbia.

Almost half of the associations, a total of 547, responded providing information on 14,728 pastors. New York's six associations all answered the questionnaires. Even the larger states had response considered heavy for a mail questionnaire. Texas, for example, had a response of almost 56 per cent.

Don Mabry, director of the department of survey and special studies, said the magnitude of the response was sufficient to make the report reliable in describing the educational attainment for pastors as a group in the entire SBC.

In the survey the superintendents of missions were asked to list the pastors in their associations by name or number and check off the highest educational attainment of each--grammar school, high school, Bible school institute or trade school, college, seminary or post college. The questionnaire also asked which type college and seminary or graduate school--Baptist, private or state--the pastors attended.

The survey indicates that 11.9 per cent completed college but had no further educational preparation for the pastorate. Another 10.4 per cent attended college but failed to complete requirements for a degree.

A total of 6,872 of the 14,726 reported on the questionnaire attended seminaries and 5,337 received degrees. Mabry concluded from the questionnaire that most of those who attended seminary were also college graduates.

Some 22 per cent have high school or less in educational attainment--14.3 per cent completing high school and the remaining 6.7 per cent failing to complete it. Almost four per cent failed to go beyond grade school.

Mabry emphasized, however, that the data only indicate the pastors' formal education and do not indicate the abilities of the men to "function effectively in their pastorates."

The survey revealed that Baptist colleges have been the principle educational institutions attended by the pastors. Almost 9,000 attended some kind of college--6,412 (or 71.5 per cent) went to Baptist institutions, 1,840 to state schools and 713 to private colleges.

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Of the 6,267 who attended a seminary or graduate school, 5,866--93.6 per cent--went to a Baptist institution. Only 183 did post-college study at a state school and 218 at a private college or seminary.

Fisher said he felt the study would be of great assistance in that it shows what the Baptist schools are doing to educate ministers and other young people. "It will be a challenge to recruiters to go after ministerial students and other vocational Christian workers," he said.

The Education Commission leader said he was surprised to learn that some 7 out of 10 pastors who had gone to college had gone to a Baptist school and added he thought it was significant that some 22 per cent of the active ministers in the SBC who had gone on to seminary had acquired from one to four years of formal college training in mainly Baptist colleges.

Bryson, who directs the Home Mission Board's in-service guidance program to provide supplementary education for pastors, said he will interpret the survey findings to other SBC agencies so conferences can be planned to assist pastors.

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'Send Resolutions Now,' 4/22/74
SBC President Urges

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (BP)--Owen Cooper, a layman and president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), has urged that persons desiring to introduce resolutions at the denomination's annual meeting in Dallas, June 11-13, send an advance copy to the resolutions committee chairman.

Lavonn D. Brown, the pastor of First Baptist Church in Norman, Okla., is chairman of the committee.

Cooper said the large number of resolutions being introduced annually to the SBC, "requires the reduction of time required for introducing resolutions and their referral to the resolutions committee."

Persons desiring to present resolutions are asked by Cooper and Brown to type the proposed resolutions, double spaced, or present them in longhand, if typing facilities aren't available.

If the resolution includes more than 200 words, a summary, in writing, of not more than 100 words must be submitted along with the resolution; the persons introducing the resolution will be required to state his or her name and read the 100 word summary only.

To prevent log-jamming of resolutions, the SBC three years ago in St. Louis adopted a recommendation from the SBC Executive Committee that added to the bylaws of the convention a request that "copies of proposed resolutions be submitted to the committee chairman 30 days before the convention in order to make possible more thorough consideration and to expedite the committee's work."

Resolutions may be introduced by any messenger, but all such resolutions are usually referred to the resolutions committee, which in turn reports on recommended resolutions during the final two days of the convention.

Cooper and Brown observed that the bylaw doesn't prohibit any messenger from introducing a resolution from the convention floor that hasn't been sent in advance to the resolutions committee. Rather, the resolutions aren't officially introduced and can't be acted upon by the committee until present to the full convention, he noted.

Mail copies of proposed resolutions to be submitted to the convention in advance to Brown, the chairman, at First Baptist Church, 211 West Comanche, Norman, Okla. 73069.

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Chaplains Commission Endorses 4/22/74
First Black for Active Duty

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ATLANTA (BP)--The Chaplains Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention has endorsed its first black chaplain for active duty with U.S. military services.

James A. Wilborn Jr., associate pastor at Union Baptist Church, was endorsed as an SBC chaplain and is awaiting orders from the U.S. Air Force.

Wilborn, 26, is a native of Atlanta and a graduate of Morehouse College and the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

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Baptist Youth Scores Big
In Sports and Game of Life

4/22/74

WACO, Tex. (BP)--The schoolboy basketball record for this Texas city was broken this season by an active Baptist youth who faced amputation of an arm several years ago.

Mike Russell, a member of First Baptist Church here, lay in a cancer hospital in Houston three years ago with a cancerous tumor in his right arm. He went through three operations and numerous cobalt treatments before the cancer was arrested.

The high school senior totaled 860-plus points this year with a 26-point average per game, also a local record.

The glory usually accompanying such athletic feats has not adversely affected Russell.

"Mike has a really great Christian spirit and is active in our church youth activities plus the Fellowship of Christian Athletes," said Al Pessarra, minister of recreation at First Baptist Church.

Russell proudly gives his testimony, saying, "Religion is a big part of my life. I can relate it to whatever I'm trying to do."

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Skinner Estate Bequeaths
$270,000 to Southwestern

4/22/74

FORT WORTH, Tex. (BP)--Mrs. Georgia Murdoch Skinner, an early-day seminary graduate whose chalk talks and flannelgraph presentations helped thousands to know more about Jesus, has bequeathed $270,000 to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

Mrs. Skinner died last year at the age of 86. Born in Reinhardt, Tex., on March 24, 1887, young Georgia Murdoch did youth work in Dallas County while still in her teens. She attended what was then the Baptist Women's Missionary Training School of Southwestern Seminary from 1915 to 1918.

After graduation she became administrator of Evangelia Settlement Home in Waco. Under her direction the children's home helped some 2,000 youngsters and widowed mothers in a 12-year period.

Miss Murdoch married Waco real estate man Murrell Skinner in 1924, but continued as superintendent for six more years. After resigning in 1930, she devoted more time to her chalk talks and helped to hold Vacation Bible Schools throughout the Central Texas region.

Following her husband's death in 1954, Mrs. Skinner continued to share the gospel through her artistic talent and her evangelistic training. She became interested in mission work in Arizona and other western states and often gave money to help start churches or sponsor a work. A trailer she gave to the Apache Baptist Association was named the "Georgia M. Skinner Chapel."

Proceeds from the bequest will be invested with the Baptist Foundation of Texas as the Georgia Murdoch Skinner Memorial Endowment Fund. Its income will be used to train others for the same sort of evangelistic life that Mrs. Skinner lived.

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Conference Views Business
And Industrial Chaplaincy

ATLANTA (BP)--Business and industrial chaplains are dealing with a massive number of people who have forgotten how to be taken seriously, a pastoral education supervisor told a group of chaplains meeting here.

"And it's up to you to take them seriously," said Don Cabiness, director of clinical pastoral education at Georgia Baptist Hospital in Atlanta, referring to business and industrial employees--the parishioners, so to speak, of the chaplains.

Cabiness spoke at the first conference of the National Business and Industrial Chaplains Association which was organized only a year ago.

One of their members, Wayne Hulon, chaplain for Motor Convoy, said the healing process for business employees comes "through the power of your presence in crisis, not in scripture or answers you bat back at them, but in being with them when they hurt."

The chaplains were told they had a unique role in the pastoral setting, that though the church is optional in today's society, the job is the one place where people still have to go.

Bob Gary, pastoral education instructor at Emory University, Atlanta, said "You can become clearly the church in their midst."

Gary emphasized that chaplains needed to retain their pastoral identity and shouldn't feel guilty if they don't feel they are productive in the classical business sense.

"You're there to provide a service, not a product," he said. "The temptation is to try to become monetarily productive and rationalize your presence through improved employee output."

"The conflict of being both a 'junior executive' and a chaplain is destructive," he added.

Hulon related his feelings as he entered the industrial chaplaincy several years ago. He thought then the only way to succeed was to cease being identified as a pastor, "but I discovered that my only contribution to the organization was my pastoral identity."

"I'm not there to help the company," said another chaplain. "I'm there to help the person who comes into my office."

Another chaplain spoke of conversations with a major airline which was considering a chaplaincy program but didn't want to call it that. "The executives had negative feelings about the word 'chaplain,'" he said.

"But we need to keep the name industrial chaplain," said Archie Faires, chaplain for American National Insurance Company of Galveston, Tex. "The name makes the setting of the Christ event and relates the job to the church as it must," he said.

Lowell F. Sodeman, associate director for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board's chaplains' division and advisor to the group, said about 75 per cent of the chaplains attending the conference were Southern Baptists.

"We're the only denomination I know of with an active and aggressive program for industrial chaplains," he said.

During the two-day conference the chaplains elected officers for 1974: Jack Boston, chaplain for Holly Farms of Wilkesboro, N. C., president; David Morris, chaplain for Pharr Yarns of McAdenville, N.C., vice president; and Nelson Hodgkins of the Industrial Counseling Service at Greensboro, N.C., secretary. Boston and Morris are Southern Baptists and Hodgkins is an Episcopalian.

In addition to the chaplains and clinical pastoral supervisors, several laymen participated in the conference: Bob Dollar, vice president of Days Inns; Jimmie Ayer, president of Home Transportation Company, and Bob Halford, director of the Metropolitan Atlanta Council on Alcohol and Drugs.

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