



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
SBC Executive Committee
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
(615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Robert J. O'Brien, News Editor
James Lee Young, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Orville Scott, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Gomer Lesch, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234
Telephone (615) 254-5461
RICHMOND Jesse G. Fletcher, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

September 11, 1974

Pardon: 'Bad' Policy,
Theology and Legal Justice

74-42

By Robert O'Brien

NASHVILLE (BP)--If President Gerald Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon for Watergate wrongdoing "was ignorance we're in real trouble, and if it was collusion, he's in real trouble," a prominent editor, theologian and church historian said here.

The timing of Ford's decision was bad judicially, policy-wise and theologically, Martin E. Marty told members of the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission during a discussion after his address to the commission's annual meeting.

"My own feeling is that a combination of humane concern, which turned into sentimentality, and impetuous action without enough study--in other words, ignorance--led to a bad decision," said Marty, associate editor of Christian Century and professor of modern church history at the University of Chicago's Divinity School.

"It's a bad decision judicially because of unequal justice under law and because he prejudged what a judge ought to have decided: whether or not there could have been a fair trial," the Lutheran clergyman elaborated in an interview.

"Worse, it's bad policy because it won't achieve what it set out to do. It prolongs the coverup. It doesn't bring facts to light. It doesn't give the nation the sense that justice was followed. It... (and Ford's subsequent statements)... let people whom the nation knows to have been guilty of crime stand a chance of getting off the hook or of being treated unequally. He either has to pardon those already convicted or be guilty of further public unequal justice."

Theologically, Marty characterized Ford's decision as one which dispensed "cheap grace."

"I'm really puzzled when I hear church people say Mr. Ford was accurately reflecting the Christian sequence. He may have been moved by his faith, but he declared mercy before there was a sign of contrition, remorse or repentance--nor had there been a declaration of guilt. In Christian terms, a pardon at that point of the sequence trivializes the sense of justice and right. Christians have to relearn the sequence."

Reflecting on what move Ford can make to prove he had no intent to continue the Watergate coverup, Marty said, "He could say, 'Just as I singlehandedly took the Constitution in hand, I will take one other moral leap and I will lay forth every trace of every kind of evidence there is. I will open it to a panel of searchers and let the people be a national jury.'"

Marty said he doesn't know the background which resulted in Ford's decision, but, he added, "I will say if it would turn out that the darkest guesses are true that there was any kind of collusion or bargain his presidency would be finished no matter how long it lasts, because I don't think anybody could tolerate that."

"I'm fighting a desperate battle to remain gentle and not turn cynical because I don't think cynicism would produce much," Marty said.

"I believe that Mr. Ford is a pious, searching man. I'm glad he has personal faith. I want that to be asserted in the public realm. He did say he was doing this as a humble servant of God. He said what I like to hear--that he has to respond to a higher law than that of the Constitution. But what is the higher law?"

"We're in real trouble if presidents start thinking God is talking to them and they start pulling capricious surprising acts... The crusades were born out of belief of people who thought

they were acting by divine guidance; they produced nothing but bloodshed and injustice... The inquisition was made up of people who thought God was telling them to enforce justice."

Personal faith, Marty said, should not rule out "using your best brains, consultation and listening to many different points of view."

Marty said he could not criticize a leader for leading but that he could criticize the suddenness of the action by an unelected president, unsure of a mandate, in office less than a month and operating in an atmosphere "with so many people more ready than I to believe there was collusion or a bargain."

"If he had gone on television and tried a couple of probes to see where he could lead the people and then someday say, 'I'm risking my presidency, but I am conscience bound to make a move you all may not agree with,' I could have admired him," Marty said.

He said he has never agreed with Ford politically but that he and his politically oriented family had been enjoying "the return of open political debate--unobsessed. I could see in my family the rebirth of respect for a president."

But, he explained, he and his family have shared the nation's instant reaction--"how could anybody be this dumb?"

"For just a flashing moment during these last several days, I've been back with Lyndon Johnson, wondering, as Johnson said, whether Mr. Ford played too much football without a helmet.

"He said he would not act precipitously, and he did. He said he would take good counsel, and he didn't. He said he would assess the whole circumstance and keep all options open, and he didn't. So, what led him, on a Sunday morning--a time an aide said they felt 'would be appropriate'--to orchestrate the pardon announcement in a home-from-church setting to set up a kind of sacral tone. It's the same old thing."

Marty said he has no desire "to see Nixon behind bars--that's not the issue. The issue is: do you let the judicial process bring to light what it ought to bring to light--and make its judgement of guilt or innocence before you pardon."

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Foreign Board Hears
Report on Mozambique

9/11/74

RICHMOND (BP)--A guardedly optimistic report on the future of Baptist work and the status of missionaries in politically-troubled Mozambique marked the September meeting of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board here.

The board also appropriated \$44,164 for relief efforts in Bangladesh and Upper Volta and heard a report from Baker J. Cauthen, executive secretary, on the board's role in channeling relief funds.

Davis Saunders, the board's area secretary for Eastern and Southern Africa, sharing the contents of a wire just received from Bud Fray, missionary in the area, characterized the situation in Mozambique as "tense and troubled."

However, earlier reports are more encouraging. Quoting Ernest Harvey, missionary to Mozambique, Saunders indicated missionaries are continuing their work with "much more freedom than ever experienced by Protestant missionaries in Mozambique."

"Doors are wide open for missionaries," Saunders continued quoting Harvey. "Within the last three weeks, immigration requirements have been greatly lessened for missionaries to enter. If we just had missionaries who were ready to come ow!"

Saunders reported that soon after the revolution in Portugal, First Baptist Church of Lourenzo Marques held the first open air service in its 25-year history. The Portuguese Baptist leaders have requested three other Southern Baptist missionary couples to join the Harveys.

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Of the relief funds appropriated, \$33,664 was designated to help Bangladesh recover from floods that recently engulfed two-thirds of the nation. The remaining \$10,500 went to Upper Volta for a well-digging project and a food distribution program in the West African country struggling to recover from several years of drought and famine.

"During the critical months of famine in Africa many churches have written asking if the Foreign Mission Board can handle relief funds," Cauthen said. "It is a joy to give assurance to Southern Baptists that the board has served as a channel for relief for many years. With mission work in 81 countries, we are in a position to minister first hand to the tragedies which arise."

Cauthen mentioned two types of relief needs--the on-going suffering caused by poverty, malnutrition, disease and homelessness and emergency needs resulting from natural disasters.

"Added to this," Cauthen continued, "is the growing threat of food shortage on a scale the world has not experienced before. The population increase is unchecked and food supplies are growing more limited. There will need to be vast amounts of direct relief to people in hunger and also efforts to improve the possibility that people might help themselves."

The board also reappointed Mr. and Mrs. Thurmon E. Bryant, who served in South Brazil from 1958 to 1972, to return to Brazil.

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Missionaries Aid Bengalis
As Floods Devastate Nation

9/11/74

By James McKinley Jr.

DACCA, Bangladesh (BP)--The huge jet cargo plane touched down easily at the Dacca airport. The load, heavy and precious, contained food for the starving victims of a flood that engulfs two-thirds of Bangladesh.

This is the third time in five years the Bengalis have faced national devastation. The first time, in November 1970, another flood swept the land killing a half-million people. Then, just four months later, a war for independence took the lives of three million more.

This flood, the worse since 1954 according to Southern Baptist missionaries in the area, has affected 30 million people. The rice crops are destroyed. The next harvest will be at best delayed. The waters must recede before the people can plant.

Coming to the aid of Bangladesh are several mission organizations including the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board. The board in its September meeting appropriated a total of \$33,664 for relief efforts related to the floods. Of the total, \$10,000 was from relief funds, \$22,453 came from capital funds to be re-designated from agricultural work to flood relief, and \$1,211 was received as a special gift from the First Southern Baptist Church in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Already James E. Young, Southern Baptist missionary, with the help of Bengali Christians, has distributed four truck loads of rice seedlings in one area where a crop would have been impossible next year without them.

Thomas E. Thurman, Southern Baptist missionary, has purchased medicines to be distributed by the Faridpur Baptist Church and missionary Thomas D. Kirkpatrick.

In another area, missionary Carl F. Ryther has supplied 1,000 ducks. These baby ducks grow quickly and will become food for hungry stomachs. Ryther has also purchased and distributed 3,000 baby fish of a fast-growing species that will soon alleviate suffering for some. Orders have been placed for an additional 50,000 baby fish.

R.T. Ruckley began work immediately assisting the Salvation Army and local organizations in supplying food to the desperate people.

The new appropriations will be used for purchasing ducks and fish, sinking tube wells and building houses. Then, also, money will be used for distribution of seed the missionaries hope to receive from other groups.

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Ducks will be used now and to build up flocks for the future, and fish will be furnishing food within four months. The houses, built by missionaries in the past, stand today as proof of the permanence of the efforts. Tube wells will supply pure water and therefore aid in alleviating the disease that comes with flooding.

Only one missionary injury was reported related to the flood. Dan Hill, 6-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. D. R. (Danny) Hill, suffered a broken leg in a bus wreck while traveling to a flood area with his father.

In a land that often faces great floods, most agree that this is the worst. Missionaries, though, in most cases sent as preachers, are answering the physical needs of the people as well as the spiritual needs.

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James McKinley Jr. is a Southern Baptist missionary stationed in Dacca, Bangladesh.

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President Pays Tribute to
Jewish Legacy of Justice

9/11/74

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Gerald R. Ford issued a message here in which he paid tribute to the contributions of Judaism to American life on the occasion of the two most important holidays on the Jewish calendar.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year, will be observed this year on September 17, while Yom Kippur, or the day of atonement, falls on September 26. The latter is a solemn fast day marked by continuous prayer and repentance according to rites described in Leviticus 16.

In his message, released to coincide with the two Jewish high holy days, the President said: "Your inheritance of accumulated wisdom and moral precepts makes you strong guardians of the ideals of righteousness, justice and human dignity.

"This has given you," he continued, "a special sensitivity to the social needs of each generation. And this has also been the building force behind your impressive contributions to the vitality of our American democracy."

Ford continued: "These solemn days of worship which you celebrate have a message for all Americans. They exhort us to search our souls, to render an inner accounting, and a self-examination of the standards we profess and the actions we perform.

"They invite us to a return to righteousness and truth and to a rebirth in the spirit of neighborliness and brotherhood. They remind us that we are in God's hands and that he has given us our lives in trust to use in his service," the President said.

Ford also paid tribute to "the traditions of valor and resilience that mark the history of the Jewish people."

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CORRECTIONS

In Baptist Press story mailed 9-10-74, entitled Lolley Receives CLC's Distinguished Service Award, change Greensboro, N.C., to Winston Salem, N.C., in first line of graph 8.

In Baptist Press story mailed 9-10-74, entitled Black Baptists Decry Paternalism of Whites, change the word, which, to the word, with, in line 3 of graph 6, making that read: with any Baptist body, etc. Add the words: at a meeting in Atlanta." at the end of graph 10. Thanks.

--Baptist Press