



BAPTIST PRESS

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75-160

Baptist Broadcast Chief Praises 'Family Viewing'

FORT WORTH (BP)--Television's controversial "family viewing" concept--not strong enough for some critics and attacked by others as "blatant censorship"--was praised here by a Baptist broadcast leader as "a step in the right direction."

Paul M. Stevens of Fort Worth, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, expressed "deep concern about the clamor of minority groups concerning the family viewing concept and urged vocal public support of the new idea.

"The family viewing time period adopted by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) and accepted by all stations and networks who subscribe to the NAB code is a matter of vital concern to people interested in the spiritual and moral welfare of our country," he said.

Stevens' reaction was due to a lawsuit threat received by CBS from the Writers Guild of America, Directors Guild of America, and Screen Actors Guild to challenge the continued enforcement of the family viewing concept.

They said, "It is our opinion that this censorship rule has drastically curtailed the free flow of ideas and expressions on television and is stifling the creativity of many artists."

Stevens said, "Seeing what these people are responsible for putting in the theaters of America makes me discount their objections by about 90 percent. They want their standards for theater fare--which many people deplore--to extend to the television set."

Family viewing provides that the networks and stations involved will refrain from broadcasting programs "inappropriate for viewing by general family audiences" during the first two evening prime time hours. Occasional exceptions with warning advisory announcement are permitted.

"I recognize that churches have no more right than other institutions to dictate policies or codes to other Americans," Stevens said. "But we have as much an obligation to make our influence felt on this television prime time family viewing concept as any other group in this country.

"Speaking only for myself and for the agency I direct, I intend to stand squarely beside the National Association of Broadcasters and the networks and stations in supporting their family viewing prime time recommendations."

The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, broadcast agency of the nation's largest Protestant-evangelical body, is one of the world's largest producers of radio and television programs for public service broadcast.

An editorial in the commission's Beam International, monthly newsletter for broadcasters, quoted Stevens:

"Anything that affects the social well-being of our nation instantly arouses an intense interest in organized religious groups. If, in addition, the family itself is the focal point of any such discussion, then the Christian churches and the Jewish synagogues of America will seek and maintain the highest degree of interest in such a matter."

Stevens called the family viewing concept "an admirable example of self-discipline by an industry that does more internal policing than most any other in the United States" and urged the public to keep an open mind on the matter.

"We must refuse to be polarized by the loud minority at either end of the scale," he said.

Stevens said the family viewing concept is not censorship. "The group condemning it--composed largely of Hollywood television writers, producers, and actors--pays no attention to the fact that family viewing calls for no government involvement, and relies on self-regulation by each individual broadcaster," he said.

"This group really may be objecting to having to stretch a bit to do a better job of writing and production where sex and violence are under control. When they can no longer fall back on double-entendres and titilating situations they will more than likely have to spend more time on each script."

Stevens also criticized the group of critics which he said "consists of self-appointed censors who have declared the family viewing period meaningless.

"They demand controls over the total content of television entertainment in America, regardless of the effect that such controls would have on the First Amendment and freedom of expression.

"These people want to substitute their judgment for that of broadcasting. These critics ignore the fact that, in addition, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Richard Wiley has often said there is no legal basis for government action in this area."

Stevens called both options "unacceptable to a thinking populace.

"The fact that these two groups have polarized themselves indicates that there is a third position," he said. "This is the middle position that recognizes that family viewing is a major breakthrough, though it is only a first step."

He called the present guidelines "the product of give and take, worked out within the industry. That they are imperfect is acknowledged but let's accept the imperfections for now and begin thinking immediate improvement all along the line."

The present improvement would allow families to watch television together, offering learning opportunities for both parents and children, Stevens noted.

"The family is the backbone of this nation, and it is under attack as in no other time in history," he said. "Thus, anything anyone can do to encourage the family to be together again is of utmost importance to our nation's welfare."

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Angola Needs Prayer
On Independence Day

By June Pike

Baptist Press
10/17/75

LUANDA, Angola (BP)--Sometime ago, Nov. 11, 1975, was officially designated Independence Day for the Portuguese overseas state of Angola.

On that day, the Christians of Luanda will join together in the First Baptist Church at 6 a.m. to ask God's blessing as the new nation is born and to call upon him to heal their war-torn land.

Curtis Dixon, James V. Holland, Harrison H. Pike and Albert C. Sutton Jr., four missionaries of the Angola organization of Southern Baptist missionaries, will be there to share this experience.

Christians should pray for this potentially wealthy new nation that it might truly be a free land where all would be granted the liberty and human dignity to worship God.

-30-

June (Mrs. Harrison H.) Pike is a Southern Baptist missionary to Angola.

Dallas Association Boots
Out Charismatic Churches

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)--The nation's largest association of Southern Baptist churches has ousted two of its member churches because they have charismatic ministries.

More than 1,000 elected "messengers" to the annual meeting of the Dallas Baptist Association listened to about an hour of often hostile debate before voting to exclude Beverly Hills Baptist Church, Dallas, and Shady Grove Baptist Church, Grand Prairie.

Although no records exist to document how many associations in the 12.5-million-member Southern Baptist Convention have taken action against charismatics, the Cincinnati Baptist Association voted in early October to refuse to seat messengers of two charismatic churches.

In the Cincinnati Association, the vote to "disfellowship" Saylor Park and Oak Hills Baptist Churches was based on a feeling that their doctrinal teachings and practice were "erroneous and disrupted fellowship," according to outgoing moderator, Leonard Quick of Milford, Ohio. In the Dallas situation, a spokesman said the two churches were in error but said ouster is a matter of fellowship, not doctrine.

C. E. Colton, chairman of the Dallas Association's credentials committee and pastor of Royal Haven Baptist Church, told messengers refusal to seat the messengers would mean they will no longer be considered "cooperating bodies in our association."

Such action in no way prevents churches from keeping ties with state and national SBC levels.

Messengers defeated a substitute motion which would have seated the churches, as well as a motion to table before refusing to seat representatives of the two Dallas churches.

The meeting marked the first time the association has identified the two churches publicly. Last year, the association passed a strongly-worded resolution asking unnamed churches with charismatic ministries to straighten up or "voluntarily withdraw."

At the 1975 meeting, Colton named the churches and said they "have openly practiced the present day phenomena of glossolalia and public faith healing services in which people are declared healed . . ."

He said the practices "represent a rather radical departure from what Southern Baptists have historically believed about biblical gifts and doctrines, thus indicative that they are in doctrinal error and are no longer in harmony with our historical Baptist practices." Colton specified, however, that the ouster is on the basis of fellowship rather than doctrine.

Quick said the Cincinnati Association action was based on the churches' "erroneous doctrinal teaching on the Baptism of the Spirit being a second work of grace, unscriptural use of tongues (practicing unknown tongues in a public session), and practice of baptizing people who were not becoming members of churches."

Colton said the Dallas action did not "come up all of a sudden," is not aimed at dictating to local churches what their practices should be, and is not prompted by "ill will or malice or hatred." Quick noted a special committee had studied the Cincinnati situation for a year before recommending unfellowshipping.

After Colton made his recommendation, A. Douglas Watterson, pastor of Cliff Temple Baptist Church--the city's second largest Baptist congregation--presented a substitute motion. It was drafted by leaders from seven of the largest churches in the city: Cliff Temple, Highland, First, Richardson, First, Oak Cliff, Gaston Avenue, Wilshire and Park Cities.

It said there is a "wide difference of opinion" about speaking in tongues and healing, and said there is "broad disagreement" about interpretation of scripture.

"Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the gifts of tongues and healing are validated by the New Testament as legitimate gifts of the Holy Spirit," the motion read.

Watterson said, however, that the motion is not an endorsement of the present phenomenon. It noted some problem areas, but called for the seating of all messengers, including Beverly Hills and Shady Grove.

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A Dallas pastor, Scott Turner of Gove Haven Baptist Church, urged adoption of the substitute motion, saying he felt "like the Devil is real proud of what we are doing" in excluding churches.

Messengers, however, voted 608 to 401 against the substitute motion. Watterson then attempted to have the original recommendation tabled, saying because of the division, there was "no way anyone can win." Colton countered that to table the motion would mean "we would have no organization."

Herbert Howard, pastor of Park Cities Baptist Church, took exception to Colton's remarks and told messengers they had not paid serious attention to the repercussions possible from the exclusion.

"What if First Baptist Church of Dallas (the nation's largest Southern Baptist congregation) had people speaking in tongues? And I don't doubt that they do. Would you throw them out?"

The audience, which was unruly at times, shouted: "Yes". "I don't believe you," Howard said.

The unrulyness of the audience led Aubrey Patterson, pastor of Highland Baptist Church to comment: "I am embarrassed by both sides . . . yelling and clapping your hands . . .", However, even after Patterson had spoken, Howard attempted to again address messengers and was shouted down.

The moderator, Billy Weber, pastor of Northway Baptist Church, ruled the motion to table failed by an "overwhelming" majority. Messengers then moved on to vote on the resolution excluding the two churches. It passed about 2 to 1.

Weber is the son of Jaroy Weber, president of the SBC and pastor of First Baptist Church, Lubbock. The elder Weber was present during the long debate on disfellowship.

Howard Conatser, pastor of Beverly Hills Baptist Church, was not present for the associational meeting. Contacted in Monroe, La., where he was preaching a revival, he said he believes the vote "has brought greater division to the Dallas Baptist Association than the charismatic movement. I never dreamed I would see the day the Dallas Baptist Association would withdraw fellowship from a sister church for believing and preaching the word of God.

"It is the historical tradition of Baptists that every church has the right to its own interpretation of the Bible."

Olen Griffing, pastor of Shady Grove Baptist Church, said the church has done nothing "extra-biblical or unscriptural. I am grieved that my brethren would vote not to fellowship with us because we choose to practice what the Bible clearly states as valid."

He echoed sentiments of pastors of the two Cincinnati Association churches, who reportedly said they would remain in the state and nationwide Southern Baptist bodies.

Clyde Fant, pastor of First Baptist Church, Richardson, also took exception to the exclusion: "The letter which was sent out said the matter would not be debated on the basis of doctrine, but on disruption of fellowship," he said.

"Today Dr. Colton said there are various interpretations of scripture, but at no time did he cite any evidence of specific cases of disruption of fellowship," Fant said. "I do not see how the association has done anything except get into the internal affairs of a church."

Fant called the exclusion a "very serious mistake," and said it will result in "more disruption of fellowship rather than less."

Howard said he "regrets" the action.

"They say the resolution doesn't do away with . . . autonomy of the local church, but it does. It says if you don't do like we do, you can't be one of us."

"How anybody can read the book of Acts and take issue with healing and speaking in tongues and everything else they do, is more than I can see."

Howard also noted the action could have serious effects and lead to a "serious rift all over our convention."

Group Urges Return to
Lord's Day; Names Director

NASHVILLE (BP)--Representatives of 14 denominations explored "The Lord's Day in Contemporary Culture" at a two-day "Consultation 75" conference here, sponsored by the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States, and elected a new executive director for the Alliance.

James P. Wesberry, 69, pastor emeritus of Morningside Baptist Church, Atlanta, a Southern Baptist congregation, was named to succeed Marion G. Bradwell, a Presbyterian from Atlanta, who will retire, Jan. 1, 1976, after 10 years as the body's top executive.

The Lord's Day Alliance, organized in 1888, is an interdenominational group "dedicated to the support and strengthening of the institution of the Lord's Day as a day of unique religious significance."

Wesberry, who has spent 49 years in the ministry, has served as pastor of Baptist churches in Georgia, South Carolina and Massachusetts and has been active in civic and denominational affairs. He is a current member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).

During the two-day meeting, a battery of speakers and panelists confronted the realities of Lord's Day observance in secular culture and interacted with 125 registrants from 15 states, the District of Columbia and Canada.

The group expressed a general consensus that the history of having a day of rest has played a big part in bringing the nation to the bicentennial and agreed that a way should be found to preserve the historic and religious tradition.

No consensus emerged on how to maintain and strengthen observance of a day of rest, as speakers and panelists took legal and economic approaches.

Harold Lindsell, editor of Christianity Today, called for legal action to establish a day of rest for secular as well as religious reasons.

"The Sabbath is God's day," Lindsell said. "But Jesus said that man was not made for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man...It was part of God's natural revelation for man in nature itself."

He urged Christians to make the secular world aware of what God reveals through nature about the value of a day of rest, citing the need for rest and the need to preserve energy and other natural resources.

"Neither man nor machines can continue indefinitely without rest," he said. "During World War II, it was found that a seven-day week did not increase production. Men actually produced less in seven days, over the long haul, than they did when working six days and resting one day."

Further, Lindsell stated, "If the people of America were to get off the highways on Sunday alone, except for church attendance or genuine necessities, the energy crisis would be virtually solved. There is nothing to show that people will buy fewer goods because they could not buy on Sunday. If all stores and factories are closed one day, nobody is losing anything since none of their competitors will be open either."

"There would be an immediate 15 percent saving of fuel and electricity," he said. "People would be able to spend time with their families, rest and relax in a less troubled environment and allow the air of the great cities to recover from the pollution largely caused by automobile exhaust and factory smoke."

Panelists approached Lord's Day observance from various perspectives, including personal faith, the home, business and industry, sports and recreations and religious liberty.

"Although government cannot successfully legislate Sabbath observance as a religious obligation for citizens, it can and should do far more than is presently done to inhibit the

deseccration of the holy days," said Franklin Littell, professor religion at Temple University, Philadelphia.

He cited commercialization, "vulgarization" of such days as Thanksgiving and Christmas and lambasted abuse of Sunday by professional athletes.

"With TV almost universal, commercialized athletics has become even more arrogant in the usurpation of the Sabbath than discount stores. Reading about the fantastic profit-taking, hearing about the way sportsmanship is sacrificed to tactics to win, sometimes bordering on the homicidal, a Christian historian inevitably remembers the circuses which centered the passions of the ancient Roman mob."

"If a person is faced with a conflict between his religious convictions and the demands of his employer, he does have some legal help," declared Donald Oosterhouse, an attorney from Grand Rapids, Mich., "This legal help is not as complete as most of us would prefer.

"I am not optimistic that this balancing is going to be, over the long term, an effective protection for the Lord's Day observer," he said. "Nonetheless, the legal protection is significant and can be utilized more effectively than it now is if people are adequately aware of it."

One problem of church observance, declared a pastor from Setauket, N. Y., is that we have "dullsville" in many of our churches.

"I suppose there isn't too much real worship or cultivation of the awareness of Christ in the average church," said William O'Byrne, pastor of Three Village Church. "Many of the modern churches seem to have narrowed worship down to a neat little formula, dispensed every Lord's Day morning from 11 A.M. to noon. The church needs to re-examine what it's doing to people. When churches make the Lord's Day more meaningful, I believe it will add immeasurably to the observance of the Lord's Day," he said.

Brooks Hays, former U. S. Congressman from Arkansas and former Southern Baptist Convention president, said, in discussing the need for a day of rest, that "we must remember pluralistic elements of our society" and make concessions to them in contemplating statutory requirements.

He said it should be primarily a matter of education, not of legislation, he said. "We must have a winsom way of reaching those who have been overcome by the mindless escalation of man's passion for entertainment."



Southern Baptists
And the Bicentennial

By Foy Valentine
For Baptist Press

The nation's Bicentennial celebration gives Southern Baptists an opportunity for celebrating the past, possessing the present and securing the future.

We have a past worth celebrating: responsible involvement in society has been a notable part of our Baptist heritage. We deeply believe that all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Voluntary involvement in government through the giving and withholding of that consent has always been a central theme of democracy; and voluntarism has been a peculiarly important dimension of the Baptist genius.

Governing ourselves by popular vote, both in our churches and in our various political entities, "we, the people" have been true to our best insights when we have accepted our moral obligation to be involved.

Another significant part of our heritage is our commitment to revolutionary ideas and bold actions. The current Bicentennial celebration, we must keep reminding ourselves, is a celebration not of the status quo but of the Revolution, one of the most profoundly consequential revolutions in the history of mankind.

Those revolutionary ideas and bold actions have related to the right to liberty, the right to the pursuit of happiness, and the right to insist that the relationship between any human being and God Almighty is a relationship with which no government on earth, secular or sacred, has any right whatsoever to interfere. Our fathers and mothers, with their revolutionary ideas and bold actions, dreamed the impossible dream. We stand today on their shoulders.

Still another important part of our heritage is the acceptance of both the priestly and the prophetic, both the innovating and the conserving dimensions of reality. Both are necessary if life is to continue and institutions are to survive.

Religious liberty and its profoundly important corollary separation of church and state, moreover, constitute for Americans in general and for Baptists in particular a kind of cornerstone for the house of our heritage.

We have a present worth possessing: if we are to possess the land and claim dominion over the present, we must avoid the special perils that confront us; the temptation to form "Christian" political parties after the fashion sometimes followed by some church bodies, the gradual fusion of church and state, the toleration of a malignant secularism, and the acceptance of a civil religion which renders to Caesar that which is God's.

As there are perils to avoid, so there are challenges to meet; the recovery of family life, new efforts to deal effectively with the crisis in education in the public schools, a never-ending war against the evils of racism, disciplined involvement in dealing with knotty economic problems like inflation and depression, the recovery of integrity, and the general development of a citizenship worthy of the Gospel.

We have a future worth securing: it is true that our spirit is wounded. In the political arena, Watergate, the Vietnam War, the cynical assault on the Constitution's Bill of Rights, and other disturbing compromises have wounded our spirit.

Also in the realm of religion, our spirit is wounded. Divisive forces of Pentecostalism and anti-denominational ecumenists have moved into Baptist churches with a determination to rule or ruin.

A tragically inauthentic evangelism has been accommodated to as something perilously close to infant baptism has been embraced. The doctrinal base on which the Baptist movement solidly stood has been fractured and eroded. And the disciplined Christian life of self-sacrifice and cross bearing has been swapped for a mess of pottage and the form of godliness.

But God has something better for America, and God has something better for Baptists. It is a future far better than we have dared to hope or think.

Let the Bicentennial celebration be the occasion for us as Americans and for us as Baptists to secure that future. (BP)