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Thanksgiving Feature

WHAT IS THERE TO CELEBRATE ?

By Henlee H. Barnette
For Baptist Press

We have so magnified the evils of our nation that what is right with America is almost completely obscured.

Granted there is corruption in government and business along with the problems of racism, crime, poverty, and religious phoniness. Yet there are some basic things that Americans can celebrate on the 200th birthday of their nation and at Thanksgiving.

We can celebrate the birth of our nation, the founding fathers, the documents (Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) which embody the ideals of our nation and make for a realistic balance of power between the branches of government.

The good news of Watergate is that our democracy works. It is a political system which can identify and correct its own evils. The basic theory of our Constitution has been demonstrated once more--namely, that the ultimate power rests with the people and not the politicians.

The impeachment of a President whose administration sought to subvert our democratic institutions and politicize governmental agencies say to the world that our government is alive and well.

We can celebrate our economic growth.

To the founding fathers our wealth today would appear incredible. Almost every family in the U.S. enjoys such luxuries as the refrigerator, the radio, the TV set. More than 90 percent have telephones, while 97 percent have washing machines and 80 percent have cars. More than 60 percent of all families own their own homes.

Let us celebrate our scientific and technological progress.

America has led the world in scientific achievements from the cotton gin to the computer and from the first airplane flight at Kitty Hawk, N.C., to the moon landings by the astronauts.

We can celebrate our educational progress.

America has schools for all children. Over 8 million youths in this nation are in colleges and graduate schools. Two thirds of them come from families that never attended college.

Today over 50 percent of all Americans 25 years old and above have finished high school. Seventeen year olds now know more about science and society than most of the graduates of a generation ago. This is in spite of the fact that many of our schools are so structured and administered as to prevent teachers from teaching and students from learning.

America has made significant progress in health care, in the liberation of oppressed citizens (women and minority racial groups), and in recreational life. Our citizens enjoy large blocks of leisure time. More working people enjoy paid vacations. Even the poor can take advantage of community recreational facilities provided by local, state, and federal funds.

Above all we can celebrate our political and religious freedom.

We can rejoice in the fact that our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, of speech, of the press, of assembly, and other basic rights. In this nation there are no "Checkpoint Charlies" for one can move about freely, exercise options, and generally feel secure from an oppressive government.

Religious freedom in America is unique. It has made for the remarkable growth of religion in this country where more than 250 different religious denominations flourish.

Synagogues, Buddhist temples, and Moslem mosques, storefront churches and cathedrals exist with full religious freedom. In communist countries there is a systematic effort to destroy all religions.

Our democracy is in a crisis. But its real threat is not foreign totalitarianism, but apathy and inaction on the part of the people. Only by exercising responsible citizenship can we preserve and promote democracy and the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (BP)

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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500 Accept Christ In Argentine Crusade

GUALEGUAYCHU, Argentina (BP)--Five hundred people--equivalent to about half the total number of members in participating churches--accepted Christ in an evangelistic campaign in October in Argentina's Entre Rio Province.

The campaign, part of the Baptist World Alliance's "World Mission of Reconciliation through Jesus Christ," was led in local Baptist churches by pastors and lay persons from Texas, California and Virginia. Southern Baptist missionaries and Argentine nationals served as interpreters.

"In some of the churches, the number of professions of faith were double the number of members," says James O. Teel Jr., Southern Baptist missionary to Argentina.

The campaign took place in a country involved in "political unrest, revolutionary activity and overwhelming economic problems," says Teel. "The campaign was not without its bizarre incidents. The largest extremist operation yet attempted in Argentina took place in a neighboring province just before the campaign started. The zeal of local police to help track them down caused more than normal search operations on the highways as the groups traveled to their churches."

Teel praised the "self-effacing humility and conviction" of the people from the States in that setting as they witnessed to the "victory, peace and happiness" which can be found "if you turn your life over to Jesus."

In Gualeguaychu, a tent was set up on a vacant lot on the main street. Evangelist Oren K. Teel led the tent meetings. He was also on the radio 13 times during the week.

Evangelist Edgar Jones led the meetings in La Paz. The La Paz city's historical museum now holds his Texas cowboy hat. He told the townspeople in a ceremony, "In Texas, when a cowboy leaves his hat somewhere, the saying is that he always goes back to get it someday."

The town of Parana named Evangelist Harold T. Branch, "Honorary Citizen." There, and in Gualeguaychu, the services were broadcast live by radio.

A month before the campaign, Witness Involvement Now (WIN) schools, a Southern Baptist personal evangelism training method, were held in many of the churches. The schools were led by people from the States. Over 100 people accepted Christ during the schools.

Mrs. Beverly Terrell, soloist, and Mrs. Betty Capshaw, pianist, toured the area a week before the crusades. They also traveled to different churches during the campaign week.

"We felt a tremendous spirit on the part of all those who came to help in the crusades," Teel said. "They lived with us, moved among us, ate our food and shared our jokes. Reconciliation is a big word. Thank God we have been with those who practice it and have known those who experience it."

Joseph B. Underwood, consultant for laymen overseas for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, organized the World Mission of Reconciliation through Jesus Christ, a Baptist World Alliance emphasis for the past five years. Jones, an area missionary in the Baptist General Convention of Texas, helped coordinate the groups in the Argentine campaign.

Cincinnati Charismatics
Deny Unscriptural Practices

CINCINNATI (BP)--Pastors of two Southern Baptist churches expelled by the Cincinnati Baptist Association for involvement in the charismatic movement deny that their congregations have adopted unscriptural worship practices.

The two churches--Saylor Park and Oak Hills Baptist Churches--were expelled from the Cincinnati Association in October. Meanwhile, the Dallas Baptist Association was "disfellowshipping" two congregations and the Trenton Association in Louisiana was refusing to seat representatives of one of its member congregations.

In an interview with Ben Kaufman, religion reporter for the Cincinnati Enquirer, Allen Falls, pastor of Oak Hills Church, said he wants to keep his congregation in the state Baptist and national Southern Baptist Conventions. William Haynes, pastor of Saylor Park Church, said his congregation may leave Southern Baptists.

Neither church sent "messengers" to the annual meeting of the Ohio Baptist Convention, Oct. 29-31, and the charismatic issue did not come up. Hence, they were not expelled. In Texas, the annual meeting of the Baptist General Convention of Texas took no action against the two Dallas Association churches, although both sent messengers. The Louisiana convention was to meet, Nov. 10-12.

Falls said three charges were brought against Oak Hills--misusing the gift of the Holy Spirit called "speaking in tongues," saying baptism of the Holy Spirit is a "second work of grace," and baptizing people without bringing them into a Southern Baptist congregation.

Falls denied he or anyone in his church teaches baptism of the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace but said he and his congregation do speak in tongues and do permit baptism of persons who do not join Oak Hills Church or another Southern Baptist congregation. He said neither or the two latter practices go contrary to scripture as he reads it.

Haynes said his congregation was charged with two "un-Baptist" practices--unscriptural speaking in tongues and teaching Holy Spirit baptism as a second work of grace. He offered the same defense as Falls on the first charge that tongues is not contrary to scripture and denied teaching Holy Spirit baptism as a second work of grace. He said his church has not baptized persons without taking them into the membership.

Both pastors said they regret the action of the association and the publicity, repeatedly saying no "hard feelings" exist in their hearts or among their members towards their "brothers" who expelled them.

Falls is seminary trained with two graduate degrees and a background in the American Baptist Churches. Haynes was called and ordained as a Southern Baptist minister, has no seminary training and works full time as a Brinks guard.

Both men serve as pastor of churches with about 100 members, although before the charismatic controversy took hold Falls' congregation had about 350 members. Haynes' congregation has not changed in size.

Falls said he is sympathetic to the fear non-charismatics sometimes show. He said he was the last of his family to receive the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." Before that experience he said of pentecostal-type worshippers: "My Lord, they're all nuts."

He said he resisted the movement of the Spirit in his life and was afraid the public use of anticipated gifts would hurt his career. He feared "ridicule" and loss of people from his congregation and "that keeps you from entering into the fullness of the experience," he said.

He told Kaufman that seminary training was a barrier--"How can I go through all that and miss something this important." He said that "drove me to seek out not what men have said" but God's Word in Scripture.

Both men said they doubt whether their accusers shared their worship sufficiently to know whether their allegations were just.

Also, both said that an investigating committee of pastors from the Cincinnati Association, called an "Encouragement Committee," visited their churches prior to the expulsion. They said they thought they had come to a meeting of minds with the committee but that expulsion followed anyway.

Falls said charismatic renewal members cite nine gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christians may receive, pointing to I Corinthians 12 and other passages. Most of the gifts, he said, go unnoticed in the quarrels over three central to the dispute--speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues and healing. He cited other "gifts of the Spirit," such as perceiving miracles, discerning spirits, prophecies, faith, special wisdom and special knowledge.

The "tongues" are ecstatic utterances in languages which the worshipper has not "learned," Falls said, adding that it is a "prayer language" which (in his experience) does not identify someone as a better Christian than one who does not have the gift. So it is with healing, interpreting tongues and other gifts, he said.

Expulsion of a church from an association does not affect its affiliation with the state and national bodies of Southern Baptists, which have a non-connectional form of church government. Each group would have to take separate action.