



BAPTIST PRESS

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76-10

North American Baptists Elect Officers; Discuss Issues

SILVER SPRING, Md. (BP)--The general committee of the North American Baptist Fellowship (NABF), meeting here, re-elected its chairman and vice chairman, discussed Baptist response to disasters and took note of the 1980 Baptist World Congress at Toronto, Canada.

Robert C. Campbell, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., was re-elected chairman and Floyd W. Harris, a Southern Baptist layman from Annandale, Va., was re-elected vice chairman.

Norman Godfrey of the Southern Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, Tenn., observed that North American Christians are responding increasingly to domestic disasters, such as floods, storms and even home fires, in addition to famine and natural disasters in other nations.

NABF participants noted a trend to "personal assistance" in disaster aftermath by Christian laity who complete training with the American Red Cross and other relief organizations.

Ronald F. Watts, general secretary of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, reporting on the NABF meeting's church and society session, said the session decided that 1976 could be a "People's Liberation Year," with concern for human rights of both sexes, all races and all ages.

Convention executives were urged to stimulate enthusiasm and participation in the Baptist World Alliance's congress in 1980. The quinquennial congress last met in North America in 1965 in Miami.

The NABF committee meeting preceded the National Baptist Bicentennial Convocation in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs. The NABF, which requested the convocation be held, is a regional fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance.

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Baptist Expresses Cautious Approval of Civil Religion

Baptist Press
1/15/76

By Donald E. Anderson

WASHINGTON (BP)--Positive results from civil religion in the United States are more evident in American life today than they were two years ago, both in the political-social and religious areas, a Southern Baptist executive said here.

But "my major fear is that civil religion be made synonymous with Christianity," said C. Welton Gaddy, director of Christian citizenship development for the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Gaddy made his remarks at the National Bicentennial Convocation, a gathering of 200 Baptist educators, pastors and executives. The convocation, a joint effort of the nine American and Canadian Baptist denominations in the North American Baptist Fellowship, is sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Gaddy noted that "each time a citizen recites the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag "a theistic confession of personal faith is uttered and a religious understanding of the national state is propagated."

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He observed that "civil religion is apparently an indisputable aspect of our national life, and...an inevitable phenomenon in any nation." But, he added, "defining civil religion, understanding its role, and evaluating its influence are burdensome tasks."

Speaking to one of the convocation's four discussion seminars, Gaddy offered his own definition of civil religion: "Civil religion represents a fusion of religious principles, cultural mores, and democratic ideals. American civil religion has skillfully and selectively borrowed from the documents of democracy, the aspirations of the citizenry, and the traditions of various faith groups. Normative principles have been established and then applied to emerging issues in various situations so that new emphases are always developing. The result is a concept dynamic rather than static in nature."

Asked what effect the Vietnam experience will have on American civil religion, Gaddy said "it's too soon to tell. We may be moving into a new era of civil religion, and it is not clear what the emphases will be."

He said the United States may move to a position of "firm interdependence" in international affairs, or, in response to the national energy crisis, it might be one of "self-sufficiency."

After reviewing the development of civil religion in American history, Gaddy noted that "apart from blatant religious rituals, President Ford has contributed to the civil religion consciousness through his approach to his two most controversial decisions."

"Regarding both the pardon of Richard Nixon and the announcement of a limited amnesty, Ford appealed to 'a power higher than the people' and confessed his belief that 'the Constitution is the supreme law of our land and it governs our actions as citizens. Only the laws of God, which govern our consciences, are superior to it.'"

In listing the positive religious effects of civil religion, Gaddy noted that "civil religion has bequeathed to the nation a heritage of moral concern" and that it "has emphasized a transcendent dimension to life" and "has created a climate conducive to religious pluralism."

In noting the negative social-political effects of civil religion, Gaddy said: "Civil religion elevates the nation and its leaders to unjustifiable places of supremacy. Civil religion dogmatizes political policies and threatens dissent. Civil religion embraces a racial bias."

Gaddy said civil religion "proclaims a false theology...the deity of civil religion is not the God revealed in Jesus Christ...The faith of civil religionists is devoid of radical content, impersonal in orientation, and a matter of human achievement," he said.

"Civil religion confuses loyalty to the nation with faithfulness to Jesus Christ," he declared. "Many Americans regard political loyalty more highly than other loyalties."

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Donald E. Anderson is editor of the Baptist Standard, news publication of the Baptist General Conference, Evanston, Ill.

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Political Scientist Charges
Baptists Have Not Kept Faith

Baptist Press
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By Reinhold J. Kerstan

WASHINGTON (BP)--"From the time of the state disestablishment battles ending in 1833 until the 1940's, the name of Baptist is all but lost in commonly available reference works on religious liberty," a Washington State University political science professor declared here.

Noting that his statement caused some startled looks among participants at a National Baptist Bicentennial Convocation, Walfred H. Peterson commented:

"Perhaps we Baptists have rested too much on the great victories of the past which insured our own particular freedom."

In his 25-minute address, he undertook to review the Baptist role in human rights, liberty and justice in the American nation.

"Did Baptists keep the faith?" asked Peterson, former director of research services for the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, sponsor of the convocation.

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After a quick glance at the past, he concluded that Baptists have not kept the faith, "at least not with regard to religious liberty."

"I have been able to find no effort by Baptists who accepted slavery to alter, for example, the rule that forbade preaching by a slave," Peterson said. "Nor can I locate data showing that Baptists tried to seek freedom-oriented solutions to the problems and persecutions of the Mormons," he continued.

Peterson then cited two cases of recent history where the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had taken a supportive stand for the religious liberty of Jehovah's Witnesses, while "no local or state or national Baptist agency came to the aid of that religious group."

"A champion of liberty is a champion of liberty for other people, not a champion for his own liberty, and Baptists were just not taking up the case of other groups," he said critically.

It is little wonder that "persons who felt that their religious freedom was being denied would not hasten to the First Baptist Church to find support," Peterson observed. He contended that these people in need of aid would rather seek it from secular sources such as the ACLU.

"Did Baptists renew the faith?" Peterson next asked his audience.

Again, he could not say too much positive about Baptist contributions. The super-strict emphasis on the separation of church and state, an anti-establishment posture, "certainly did not help in recovering the faith," he charged.

For today's Baptists, Peterson pled for a "situational church-state relationship" as they practice on most of the mission fields and in various chaplaincies. "Unless we know the essential end (religious liberty) and the less essential means (the form of church-state relations), we may find ourselves worshipping a slogan when it hurts our cause," he said.

Ending his presentation with a positive note, Peterson summed up his views by stating: "We Baptists helped give America its great measure of religious liberty . . . watch its implications we must, but we need not place our political priority there any longer.

"Today we can shift--must shift--our priority concerns to social justice. More difficult to define and achieve than religious freedom, it, nevertheless, ought to occupy this free movement in its diverse groupings for the next 200 years."

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Reinhold Kerstan is editor of the Baptist Herald, monthly publication of the North American Baptist General Conference, Forest Park, Ill.

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ARBA Honors Baptist
Agency at Convocation

Baptist Press
1/15/76

By James Lee Young

WASHINGTON (BP)--The American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) honored the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs here with a special award for contributions to the national Bicentennial effort.

The award, a large certificate, was signed by ARBA chief, John Warner, and presented by Daniel McKenzie, ARBA program manager, during the Baptist Joint Committee-sponsored National Baptist Bicentennial Convocation here.

The convocation was held at the request of the North American Baptist Fellowship, of which several member bodies are also represented on the Baptist Joint Committee.

"We are here because we believe that the observance of the Bicentennial has profound implications for the community of faith as well as the nation as a whole," said James E. Wood, the Joint Committee's executive director, who received the award.

"Furthermore, we believe that the Bicentennial is far more than a celebration of 200 years of America's nationhood," Wood said. "We perceive that the Bicentennial must mean a call to a deeper self-awareness of the American experience and the real meaning for today of the American Revolution and the basic truths embodied in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, especially the Bill of Rights.

"Centuries ago," Wood said, "the prophet Isaiah echoed a similar call to Israel when he declared, 'Look to the rock from which you were hewn.'"

The convocation, Wood said, was "not to dwell on the past," but "to provide a basis upon which to perceive the present and meet the challenges of the future.

"The American Revolution," he continued, "was more than a beginning . . . it symbolizes a commitment for the future . . . Hopefully, this convocation will help underscore . . . that the American Revolution remains unfinished in many ways . . . so long as the promise of the American Dream, 'liberty and justice for all,' remains unfulfilled."

Wood said the convocation was planned to provide an "important resource for all Baptist bodies in the United States, and the local churches which make up those bodies."

He also noted that the convocation dates, Jan. 12-15, have special significance for several reasons: The timing gave the participants the chance to "sound a prophetic note at the Bicentennial year's beginning" and the dates fall between the birthdays of two influential figures in Baptist-American history.

Friday, Jan. 9, 1976, marked the birthday of Isaac Backus, a Baptist minister who "stands out preeminently as the champion of religious liberty in the 18th Century," Wood said.

The convocation's closing date coincided with the birthday of the late Martin Luther King, Jr., born Jan. 15, 1929-- 205 years after Backus.

"No Baptist minister in the 20th Century has exerted more influence on the course of American history nor more eloquently defended the cause of human rights," he said.

"Like Backus, Dr. King suffered imprisonment for his belief in the American Dream. The legacy of Backus and of King may well be symbolic of the convocation's reason for being and its hope for the future," Wood concluded.

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Southern Seminary Offers
Off-Campus D. Min. Program

Baptist Press
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LOUISVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptist Theological Seminary here will begin its first off-campus doctor of ministry (D.Min.) degree program in Norfolk, Va., in August, 1976, a seminary spokesman said.

Seminary officials also report they are exploring the possibility of beginning similar D.Min. seminars in Nashville, Tenn., and Atlanta, Ga., he said.

Under the new program, according to dean of theology Roy Lee Honeycutt, seminars leading to the D.Min. degree will be offered in an off-campus location for a period of one year. Except for location and class schedule, the off-campus program will be identical to the on-campus degree. Members of the seminary's resident faculty will lead the seminars.

The doctor of ministry degree is an advanced professional degree in ministry. The purpose of the program of study is to equip the person committed to a Christian vocation for excellence in the practice of ministry, a seminary spokesman said.

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