



BAPTIST PRESS

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Jimmy Carter Talks
About Religion and Politics

76-81

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following interview with Jimmy Carter was conducted on the campaign trail by Jim Newton, editor, World Mission Journal, published by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Brotherhood Commission of which Carter is a trustee. A request for a similar interview on religion and the presidency is being made of President Gerald Ford by Baptist Press, the SBC news service.

Question: Why do you want to be president? What role did your Christian convictions play in your decision to run for President?

Carter: There are many reasons. I outlined most of them in my announcement speech in 1974. I say often that I agree with theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, who wrote that the purpose of government is to establish justice in a sinful world. I am committed to that purpose. I also have a conviction that whatever talent God gave me should be used to the maximum degree. I believe God wants me to be the best politician I can possibly be.

Question: How have the pressures of the campaign affected your family life, your church life? Is it worth it?

Carter: There is a lot of pressure, but I believe I've been holding up well, and so has my family. This is a very carefully planned campaign, and it's been planned for over 3½ years. I've got a very close-knit family and a very close-knit staff, and they've responded well. We all work together as a team. I have a sure sense of what I am doing.

Question: You've repeatedly said that you think you will win. Do you think you will win because God is on your side?

Carter: Well, I do think I will win, but I've never asked God to let me win. I've always prayed that I will be able to do the right thing whether I win or lose. I do pray frequently during the day. When I go home, I try to go to church every Sunday that I can, and I try to teach Sunday School when I can. Week before last I taught my class (as a substitute teacher) at Plains Baptist Church. People are always telling me that they pray for me, and I deeply appreciate that. Many times people will say as I shake hands, "God bless you," or "I'm praying for you." That means a lot to me.

Question: What are the moral and ethical issues of the campaign you are asked to speak to? Do you have position papers on the issues and are they available?

Carter: Yes, from my Atlanta office. I don't have position papers on all the issues, but I do on many of the major ones. Every week I am asked about 100 questions that refer to moral and ethical issues. I try to be honest in stating my views. The question I'm asked most about is my stand on abortion.

Question: What organized, visible support have you received from the organized church, and have you received any opposition from the organized church?

Carter: It's hard to identify sometimes. I don't really know. I've had a lot of support from Methodists. I spoke at the United Methodist General Conference three years ago, and I still get a lot of invitations to speak to Methodist groups.

Question: Gerald Ford was invited to speak at the Southern Baptist Convention in Norfolk, June 15, but you were not. Do you feel you should have been invited to make it a non-partisan thing? What is your reaction to the invitation to President Ford when the leading Democratic candidate, who is a Baptist, was not invited?

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Carter: I have had no adverse reaction to that. I don't feel excluded by not being invited this year. I spoke to the Southern Baptist Convention when it met in Dallas in 1974, and introduced Gerald Ford (then vice president) at the Brotherhood Commission-sponsored prayer breakfast.

Question: How have you responded to the news media questions when reporters ask what you mean when you say you are a "born-again" Christian? What do you say and how do they react?

Carter: It is very difficult for anyone who has not had that experience to understand. You do because you have had that experience. But many of the newsmen who ask about this have never had this experience. Some of them are downright cynical about it. I think it worries some of them.

I just explain my own spiritual experience openly and honestly. When I first was asked this question, I had to decide how I was going to respond with the same kind of openness and honesty to this question that I would to any other question.

I point out that I have been a church member since I was 10½ years old. But about 10 years ago, I realized I was missing something important. I seemed to have no purpose in life. There seemed to be no real meaning in life. I began to pray about it and to talk to others about it, and I had a personal spiritual experience that is difficult to explain to people who have never had such an experience.

I began to grow. I participated in several pioneer mission efforts (in areas where Southern Baptist work is relatively new) and was deeply inspired by a Cuban minister (Eloy Cruz) I met on one of these mission trips (in Springfield, Mass., in 1968). I became uniquely aware of the Holy Spirit as an integral part of my life. I learned that I cannot depend on myself for every need, and to solve every problem.

A lot of news reporters are mystified by this. I don't think they doubt my sincerity, but they just don't understand. I don't make a big issue out of it, but neither do I hesitate to say publicly that the most important thing in my life is Jesus Christ. There have been about 100 articles written by columnists and reporters about my religious life. Some have been quizzical, seem doubtful, some defensive, but in the main, they have been favorable.

Question: If you are elected President, how would you use the office of President to demonstrate your Christian convictions?

Carter: I would try to exemplify in every moment of my life those attitudes and actions of Christianity that I believe in. I would ask God for guidance on decisions affecting our country and make those decisions after evaluating the alternatives as best I could. I would recognize that my influence on others would be magnified 100 times over as President. I had this same experience on a smaller scale as governor of Georgia . . .

Because I am a Christian, I feel my limitations more intensely. I used to deny my limitations and conceal them. Now I am much easier in my relations with other people and with God. This helps me a lot. It even helps me politically. When I move through a crowd shaking hands with people, even in a brief encounter, I have a genuine affection for that person. (BP)

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(BP) Photo will be mailed to Baptist state papers.

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African Baptist Numbers
Increase in 1976

Baptist Press
5/11/76

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptist numbers in Africa, advancing slightly above 1975 statistics, total 827,664, according to a report by the Baptist World Alliance (BWA). African Baptist church membership totaled 791,266 a year ago.

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The number of Baptist churches in African countries declined sharply, from 7,516 last year to 6,297 now. However, the decline is apparently a technical one, said Carl W. Tiller, BWA statistician.

While the BWA does not have a country-by-country explanation of the change, Tiller observed that two factors are probably at work: first, a consolidation of congregations, often for legal purposes, in some countries, though they may still worship and function separately, and second, a reclassification of smaller churches into "chapels," particularly where the concept of a minimum membership has been adopted to meet the test of "church."

The Republic of Zaire remains far out in front in its Baptist numbers, with 238,330. Nigeria is second with 144,717, and Cameroon third with 87,387.

Among the countries where there has been civil unrest during the past year, Angola shows an increase in church membership, although some of its members, especially in the north, are probably now non-resident refugees in Zaire, according to the BWA.

Mozambique also shows a higher figure than a year ago, due principally to more complete reporting of the mission there of the Fribaptistsamfundet, a Swedish body. Ethiopia's Baptist witness has expanded also.

For two countries, technical reasons are responsible for lower figures reported this year. In Kenya, the work of the Canadian Baptist mission, formerly accounting for about 8,000 believers, has been dropped from the statistics, since the cooperating national church body is not specifically Baptist. In Rhodesia, where both Southern Baptists (USA) and South African Baptists have work, some duplication was discovered in last year's data and eliminated.

An offsetting increase occurs in Zambia, where more complete reports for both the Australian Baptist mission and the work of the Swedish Fribaptistsamfundet has boosted the national total to more than double the figure which had previously been carried. There are now 17,721 Baptists reported in the country.

One nation--Algeria--dropped off the Baptists' African list. Earlier statistics had included three churches initiated by a mission not affiliated with the BWA. The mission has withdrawn and, in the absence of contact with the churches, the BWA has dropped them from the African figures.

Over a period of the last several years, the African Baptist population has shown a considerable increase. Numbers for recent years (after correcting for an error in the period 1970-1972 inclusive), were: 1969, 471,856; 1970, 496,311; 1971, 512,214; 1972, 583,266; 1973, 652,198; and 1974, 716,032.

	BAPTISTS IN AFRICA			
	1976 ^a		1975	
	Churches	Members	Churches	Members
Algeria	0	0	3	210
Angola	68	13,815	35	9,518
Benin	15	584	14	450
Botswana	3	96	2	48
Burundi	6	3,368	5	3,561
Cameroon	1,226	87,387	1,416	89,108
Cape Verde Islands	4	200	4	200
Central African Republic	160	40,000	600	40,000
Chad	50	3,000	50	3,000
Congo	4	2,500	100	6,000
Egypt	8	427	8	427
Ethiopia	34	1,471	12	821
Ghana	85	3,916	66	2,587
Ivory Coast	41	3,875	46	3,565
Kenya	264	18,100	431	22,815
Lesotho	18	1,009	20	701
Liberia	182	40,650	224	32,694
Libya	1	395	1	325
Malagasy Republic	10	292	10	292
Malawi	757	56,832	828	55,218
Mali	4	25	1	25
Morocco ^b	0	0	0	0

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1976 ^a(continued)

1975 (continued)

	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>
Mozambique	352	36,925	42	2,967
Niger	12	470	8	250
Nigeria	835	144,717	834	146,339
Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)	86	11,738	144	19,868
Rwanda	25	18,616	122	18,431
Senegal	0	2	0	2
Sierra Leone	12	1,526	8	1,206
South Africa	730	55,720	896	53,444
Swaziland	4	197	4	197
Tanzania	316	15,827	300	15,092
Togo	13	1,129	12	1,011
Uganda	106	6,366	148	7,831
Upper Volta	1	170	1	162
Zaire	669	238,330	1,015	246,469
Zambia	190	17,721	101	6,161
Dependencies:				
Namibia (Southwest Africa)	4	188	3	191
St. Helena	2	80	2	80
TOTAL	6,297	827,664	7,516	791,266

^a Preliminary statistics

^b Although Morocco is listed in the schedule with blanks, there is a Baptist mission there, with a Sunday school enrollment of 30, but no church members reported as yet. The following places in Africa not listed above have neither Baptist churches nor Baptist missions: the nations of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mauritania, Mauritius, Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia, and the dependencies of Afars and Issas, British Indian Ocean Territory, Comoro Islands, Reunion, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and Spanish Sahara.

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Baptists Thanked
For Relief Efforts

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5/11/76

RICHMOND (BP)--Officials of the United States Department of State have thanked the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board for the immediacy of its response to the Guatemalan earthquake disaster.

"We are especially pleased your organization is geared to provide an immediate response, with personnel who are culturally sensitive, proficient in the language, and accustomed to provide medical assistance under difficult conditions, with a minimum of distraction from the chaos around them," Paul Bell wrote James G. Harris, board president.

During the early hours after the earthquake hit, Southern Baptist missionaries had begun to purchase food for distribution, notes Bell, the State Department's liaison officer for private and voluntary organization.

A shipment of medical supplies arranged by Franklin T. Fowler, the board's medical consultant, was sent during the first week of the disaster. Six Spanish-speaking doctors and a Spanish-speaking nurse were also sent by the board.

A report to President Gerald R. Ford from Daniel Parker, administrator of the State Department's Agency for International Development (AID), said that in the hours after the quake, "virtually all immediate relief assistance was limited to that available locally."

"Thus the rapidity of your staff's (the board's) response was crucial," Bell pointed out. "It is in the 48 hours immediately following a disaster that medical help, food and temporary shelter are of such great importance."

Parker lists the board along with other voluntary agencies who "have provided and are providing generous and effective support as they put to quick use long and practical experience in dealing with disasters."

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The board has appropriated a total of \$397,000 for relief and reconstruction efforts in Guatemala. Reconstruction crews of Baptist laymen from Illinois, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas and Georgia--totaling 117 men--have aided in rebuilding churches. Along with Guatemalans, the crew members have also helped tear down dangerously cracked and crumbling buildings to clear the sites for construction of new buildings.

Crews from California, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and Oklahoma are scheduled to help with reconstruction efforts in the future. In addition to medical personnel and reconstruction crews, Texas Baptists also sent 35 Spanish-speaking evangelists to aid in meeting the spiritual needs of the people. The Baptist conventions of Costa Rica and Honduras also sent Spanish-speaking evangelists.

Bell also lauded the efforts of board staff members, especially Fowler, W. Eugene Grubbs, disaster relief coordinator and consultant for laymen overseas, and W.L. (Wimpy) Smith, assistant disaster relief coordinator and consultant for laymen overseas.

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Bible 'Dangerous' Out of
Context, Ministers Say

Baptist Press
5/11/76

By Laura Deni

SEATTLE, Wash. (BP)--The Bible can be dangerous when misinterpreted, say three Seattle ministers in the wake of two bizarre and almost identical, but widely separated, self-mutilations of young men.

"The gospel is a very dangerous commodity when it is mishandled by cults and sects that interpret it in a dogmatic manner," said Donovan Cook, pastor of the University Baptist Church.

On April 13, a University of Washington student, Kirk Kiessling, 18, appeared in the doorway of his dormitory room with his right hand cut off and his right eye gouged out. Officers said he did it because of a passage in Matthew, which he quoted:

"And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell.

"And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee..."

Similarly, Brad E. Wild, 20, of Windsor, Colo., stood in his home with his Bible opened to the passage and hacked off his right hand with a meat saw. He asked a roommate to help gouge out his eye but was refused. Surgeons have reattached the hand.

"There's a movement in our day, which I think is somewhat dangerous, where people get carried away with the demands of God and not seeing the love of Jesus Christ," said Steve Hayner of University Presbyterian Church.

Minister Roy Johnson of the Philadelphia Church, who interprets the Bible literally, says "there are strong demonic influences in the world causing people to do very strange things in the name of religion."

Johnson said the mutilated men misunderstood the Matthew passage. He said Christ was telling his disciples to "throw off what is bothering you...to get rid of it...not to literally cut off your hand or damage your eye."

Britt Johnson, Kiessling's roommate, said Kiessling was a loner who had started reading the Bible two weeks before the incident. He said Kiessling had become a strong believer in strict interpretation of the Bible.

The father of the Colorado man said his son was seeking answers to emotional problems. A sheriff's department investigating the incident said the young man had experienced some sort of religious conversion about three weeks before the incident.

Use of drugs was discounted in both incidents. Wild's father said his son had "only experimented at the most" and Johnson said Kiessling had quit using marijuana prior to the religious conversion.

Cook said the solution is for ministers to stand up and question the fanatical movements and their leaders of the day, but added that won't be easy.

"No one wants to be critical of the chief priests of the day."

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British Baptists Slow
Down Membership Decline

LONDON (BP)--A steady decline in membership of Baptist churches in Britain has almost been halted, the annual assembly of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland were told in sessions at Westminster Chapel here.

In a report hailed as "particularly encouraging", aggregate membership in the union's congregations was shown at 187,066--only 78 less than last year's total.

Although the number of children enrolled dropped 2,051 to 142,278, there were 2,075 more in young people's organizations with 39,009. Baptisms were down, by 108, to 5,215, a figure called "disappointing" in view of increases of recent years.

In action which led to a resolution on human rights, the assembly defined its use of the term "prisoner of conscience" as one who is "imprisoned, detained, restricted, or otherwise subjected to physical coercion or restriction by reason of his or her political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs," and who "neither uses nor advocates violence."

An earlier resolution, arising spontaneously but passed by an overwhelming vote, recognized "the constructive, courageous and vital contribution" which Union General Secretary David Russell is making in the matter of human rights and religious liberties and urged him to continue.

Russell had stressed in his annual report that concern for social justice and for individual salvation must not be divorced from each other.

Calling on churches to take a fresh look at their mission, he said that to separate the two was to shatter the wholeness of the Christian gospel and warned that wherever its wholeness was denied--"be it in the USSR, in Chile, in South Africa, or in Britain--there Christ's church must be, struggling for that integrity, that wholeness which is the gift of God.

"And let us be clear about this," he continued, "it is denied in a world which permits poverty in the midst of affluence, which demonstrates racial discrimination and denies human rights, which allows men and women to be manipulated and exploited, which ravages the earth and prostitutes God's own creation."

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Italian Baptists Stave
Off Financial Ruin

RIMINI, Italy (BP)--A Baptist deacon's legal skill and tax expertise has helped to avert almost certain financial disaster for Baptists in Italy, according to European Baptist Press Service (EBPS).

In a series of assessments dating from 1962, tax liabilities against the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union for property transfers has mushroomed until this year, with penalties, the claims stood at more than 211 million liras (over \$251,000 U.S.)

The union contended that, according to Italian law, it was exempt from the taxes as a non-profit organization. Although legal counsel was retained, no one seemed able to vindicate the union's position.

The union treasurer urged Domenico Troja, a deacon in Rome's Lungaretta (Transtevere) Baptist Church, to look at the case last December. Troja is a professor in economics and tax matters and operates a corporation tax consulting service. He is also a lay preacher who feels "the Lord helped work a plan out."

After six trips to Turin, he was able to prove that the properties--buildings of several churches and of one institution--actually are held by a non-profit organization, that it is exempt from taxes on holding which return no profit, and that the original tax claim was invalid.

"Regular and recognized state taxes will still be paid this year by the union. They amount to about eight million liras" (about \$9,500 U.S.), EBPS said. "But the weight of financial ruin and the need to sell other church buildings to repay an erroneous claim has been lifted."

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CORRECTION

In Baptist Press story mailed 5/7/76, entitled "Suggestions Needed for SBC Convention Sermon," change last three words in graph 3 to read ...for final action (rather than ...for fund action).

Thanks,
Baptist Press