

(BP)**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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76-86

Religion in Politics
Topic on 'Today' Show

NEW YORK (BP)--Separation of church and state does not mean that politicians--particularly political candidates--should refrain from publicly expressing religious conviction and beliefs, Foy Valentine, executive of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission (CLC) said here on national television.

Specific reference was made on NBC-television's "Today" show interview to Southern Baptist-layman and Democratic Presidential hopeful Jimmy Carter of Georgia, who has been widely quoted on his Christian experience.

Other panel members were Malcolm Boyd, Episcopal priest and writer, Michael Novak, lay Catholic theologian and political analyst.

All cautioned against using religion to manipulate people and public opinion.

The Carter phenomenon was compared by Novak to the following gained by the late President John F. Kennedy, a Catholic, as a cultural reaction, triggering an emotional response of "great warmth" in many people.

Valentine said he believes most Americans are agreed that the "cogs of religion ought not to engage the gears of the state and vice versa. This does not mean that religion and politics are not to mix . . . We saw a sinister and cynical manipulation of religious symbols by the previous administration. That we can and should and must reject . . ."

Justice and morality need to be communicated by politicians and churchmen alike, whatever their religious persuasion, Valentine noted.

Boyd said public expressions of religious beliefs by campaigning politicians may be "quite honest" and not manipulation. But he cautioned that any public figure ought to be aware that to say "God" or "Christ" may trigger many different interpretations among those in today's "fragmented" church.

Valentine said, however, "We are not all that morally fragmented in this country. True, there are minority groups of various kinds . . . While this country may not be at its core moral and believing, it at least wants to move in that direction."

Valentine further noted, "To keep church and state separate simply does not require that any one of these candidates separate his moral and even his religious convictions from his public life; he cannot separate those. He may properly wish not to even talk as much as some of them have been doing but the news people and the various media have been pulling this out of them (about their religious experience).

Boyd cautioned against getting so close to the heights of power that the prophetic voice is lost. He referred specifically to the Presidency and "court chaplains," a policy which Valentine also warned against as a possible manipulation of religion for political gain, including political prayer breakfasts and White House worship services.

Despite some "lively disagreements," among the panel members, Valentine observed later, "there was basic agreement that the great moral values championed by Christianity are needed on today's political scene.

"Christianity is concerned both with the Christian's private and public life, both with a right relationship to God and with right relationships to others--including politics and the moral use of power," he concluded.

9 North American Baptist
Bodies Increase, Says BWA

WASHINGTON (BP)--Nine Baptist bodies in North America, led by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), increased numerically this past year, according to the Baptist World Alliance (BWA).

However the overall number of Baptists, in the United States and in North America, declined from figures reported a year ago, due principally to a "belated recognition" of a "long-term decline" in one group, the National Primitive Baptists, the BWA said. Continental totals for Baptists are: 100,949 churches, and 28,798,349 church members.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), dominant body in American Protestantism, had a net gain of over 200,000 church members, coming to a high of 12,735,663 in 34,902 churches. The Progressive National Baptist Convention was next in gains, reporting 154 additional churches and its membership up 200,000, to a new 750,000 total.

While a part of the Progressive Convention's gain came from the planting of new congregations and the receiving of additional members on confession of faith in the older congregations, it appears that part of their gain may also have represented transfer of congregations from other Baptist conventions, according to the BWA.

The largest decline in North America cited by the BWA was reported by the National Primitive Baptist Convention. "It is largely illusory," said Carl W. Tiller, BWA statistician, "It had previously been carried for five years at its 1971 figures of 2,198 churches and 1,645,000 members. This year a convention officer reports its totals at 515 churches and 250,000 church members. The convention actually experienced a membership growth of about 5,000 in the year immediately past," he said.

By nation or dependency, the new BWA statistics are reported to be:

	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>
Canada	1,438	186,539
Mexico	356	41,195
United States	99,135	28,566,935
Bermuda	20	3,680
TOTALS	100,949	28,798,349

But it is likely that the real Baptist church membership figure for the United States is as high as 29 million, Tiller says, if all the data were known. In various conventions, there are church clerks who have not reported their statistics.

Among Southern Baptists 430 churches and among 1,284 American Baptist churches did not submit statistical reports. Hence, their church members were excluded from the count, he noted. Neither convention makes an estimate to cover such unreported persons, Tiller said.

Mexico's figures, according to the BWA, showed the most "startling change"--from 25,786 members a year ago to a current 41,195. In the interim, the Baptist Convention there had a baptism ratio of about one baptism to each 10 church members; it opened 41 churches and 54 additional preaching points; Sunday school enrollment jumped more than 11,000; and 45 pastors were added to the roster, the report noted.

Data for some Baptist bodies, shown in the accompanying schedule, will be unfamiliar because figures for each convention are divided by the BWA among the countries in which its churches are located.

The BWA's data for the U. S. also differ appreciably from some Baptist statistics published by others. Other figures still carry the outdated data for the National Primitive Baptists, Tiller said. Also, the BWA acknowledges existence of several bodies not listed elsewhere, notably the Baptist Bible Fellowship with 2,332 churches and an estimated 1,200,000 members in North America.

The BWA statistics also include a North Carolina body of Free Will Baptists, a body of "Independent" Baptists in the North Central States, and an estimate of other Baptist churches which have no denominational affiliations. The BWA also deducts for the duplication in numbers (500 churches, 184,000 members) which would otherwise occur because some Baptist congregations are members of two or more national denominational bodies concurrently.

North American membership figures for recent years, as reported by the BWA, were : 1969--26,603,339; 1970--27,250,364; 1971--27,239,052; 1972--27,527,641; 1973--29,013,168; 1974--29,596,096; and 1975--29,681,927.

BAPTISTS IN NORTH AMERICA

	1976 ^a		1975	
	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Churches</u>	<u>Members</u>
United States of America ^b				
American Bapt. Association	3,300	950,000	3,100	869,000
American Bapt. Churches	5,914	1,559,610	5,928	1,567,271
Baptist Bible Fellowship	2,332	1,200,000	2,324	1,250,000
Baptist Gen. Conference	631	113,957	632	111,093
Bapt. Missionary Assoc. of America	1,440	203,903	1,437	199,640
Conservative Bapt. Association of America	1,127	300,000	1,127	300,000
General Association of General Baptists	845	69,600	850	70,000
General Association of Regular Bapt. Churches	1,503	232,100	1,495	225,463
National Association of Free Will Baptists	2,400	225,000	2,400	220,000
National Bapt. Convention of America	12,392	3,499,000	12,392	3,499,000
National Bapt. Convention, USA, Inc.	26,870	6,283,000	26,870	6,283,000
National Primitive Bapt. Conv.	515	250,000	2,198	1,645,000
New Testament Assoc. of Indep. Bapt. Churches	50	5,200	0 ^c	0 ^c
North American Bapt. General Conference	248	41,895	246	41,434
Original Free Will Baptists, N. C. State Conv.	430	42,000	0 ^c	0 ^c
Progressive National Bapt. Convention	1,474	748,000	680	548,000
Seventh Day Bapt. General Conference	62	5,177	62	5,338
Southern Bapt. Convention	34,866	12,732,343	34,711	12,513,747
United Free Will Baptists	836	100,000	836	100,000
Other	2,400	190,000	2,284	179,496
Deduct duplication (-) ^d	<u>(-) 500</u>	<u>(-)184,000</u>	<u>(-) 300</u>	<u>(-)165,000</u>
Subtotal, U.S.A.	99,135	28,566,785	99,272	29,462,482

^a Preliminary.

^b Excludes Puerto Rico, which is counted as a part of the statistics for "Central America and Caribbean Islands."

^c Overlooked when the statistics for 1975 were prepared.

^d This entry is made to eliminate the error which would otherwise occur in the total because some churches are counted in two, or even three, conventions.

R. J. Robinson Accepts
Connecticut Pastorate

AUGUSTA, Ga. (BP)--R. J. Robinson, former pastor of First Baptist Church here, has accepted the pastorate of Greenwich Baptist Church, Greenwich, Conn., effective immediately.

The Greenwich church is the largest Southern Baptist congregation affiliated with the New York State (Southern) Baptist Convention.

Robinson was pastor of Augusta First Baptist Church 21 years before resigning in August 1974. The church asked him to reconsider his resignation the following December, but Robinson declined. He has been in secular business in Augusta since that time.

Dr. and Mrs. Robinson were divorced in September 1974 but remarried in August 1975. Robinson, a former All-America basketball player at Baylor University, Waco, Tex., has held many leadership posts in the Georgia and Southern Baptist Conventions. He was president of the Georgia Baptist Convention in 1970-71 and preached the 1974 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) sermon in Dallas.

The SBC was organized at First Baptist Church, Augusta, in 1845.

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Minister Almost Robbed--
'Pastorate Isn't Dull'

Baptist Press
5/19/76

NASHVILLE (BP)--"There's nothing dull about being a pastor," says Bill Sherman, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church here.

In the past four years the church's buildings have been struck twice by lightning, a major fire in 1974 resulted in \$400,000 damage, and the choir room was pilfered during a recent worship service.

But it will take some doing to top Sherman's latest experience as pastor of the Southern Baptist congregation.

On a recent Sunday evening two men, posing as detectives, walked in following the evening worship service and asked to speak to Sherman in his office.

Somewhat suspicious and noting the men had been drinking, Sherman took them to one side of the auditorium, in sight of some other church members. The two told him the church was going to be robbed. One produced what looked to be, Sherman said, a valid police identification with the Los Angeles, Calif., Police Department name on it. But the minister told the two they would have to be verified by Nashville Police. They left, "still looking over their shoulders," Sherman recalled.

Outside the building, unknown to Sherman until later, the two encountered vice squad and other Nashville Police who had been staked out near the church, during services, after receiving a tip that the two planned to rob the church, as Sherman was told. A woman accomplice was picked up in a car a block away, reports said.

News accounts said the two ran, rather than halt as directed by police, and were shot as they crossed a neighboring yard to the rear of the church.

Sherman said he was told the method the men used was similar to that in a restaurant robbery a few nights earlier. Reports indicated the two were to be questioned concerning robberies of community churches in Reno and Azle, Tex., in recent weeks.

The Baptist minister said he and the Woodmont congregation were being "extra careful" about locking church doors. And, Sherman said, he would use "utmost discretion and care not to be lured off to a private place by such persons."

The church was robbed recently, he added, when a man pilfered choir members' belongings during a Sunday morning worship service. A choir member chased the robber who escaped.

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