

**BAPTIST PRESS**

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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February 16, 1977

77-29

**'Roots' Offers Positive
Race Relations Vehicle**

NASHVILLE (BP)--The nationally televised saga of "Roots," which has caused widespread reactions across the country, is viewed by two Southern Baptist agency executives--one black and one white--as a vehicle which will provide positive opportunities for improved race relations despite the negatives of the past.

During the television version of Alex Haley's novel, Emmanuel McCall of Atlanta, director of cooperative ministries with National (black) Baptists for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, was teaching a course on the black church during a month-long January "J-term" at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville. He and his students viewed and studied it together.

John A. Wood of Nashville, director of program development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, also viewed each segment.

McCall, a black, who has also studied the novel, plans to revise the course content at the seminary's June J-term this year to deal with "The Theological Implications of Roots" and team teach it with two of his associates. He said the seminary's Black Church Studies department is also planning course offerings in the 1978 J-terms (January, June and July) which will respond to opportunities made possible by parallels and sequels to "Roots" he said are now being planned by each of the TV networks for later viewing.

"As one white person," said Wood, "I am guarding against becoming overly defensive about the portrayal of slavery in 'Roots.' Yes, it was one-sided," he said in reference to some criticisms of the televised version. "It appeared to portray all blacks as good and all whites as evil.

"The purpose of the programs, however, seem to have been to view history from the slaves' point of view," Wood continued. "Slavery inflicted massive dehumanization and cruelty upon blacks; and slavery left a dreadful heritage on whites.

"The system was evil even when the slave owners were benevolent," Wood declared. "No amount of kindness could ever compensate for the loss of personal freedom. Two of the most grievous legacies of slavery are--the disruption of the black family and the fostering of black psychological dependence upon whites. The damage to the black family and the black psyche was severe, and the effects linger to this day. It is a testimony to the soul-strength of the blacks that they were able to survive . . ."

From his perspective as a black, McCall says that "most blacks over 25, especially having lived in the South, can still identify with incidents comparable to some of those portrayed in 'Roots.' That's why the viewing was painful for most of us.

"Tragically, but true," McCall continued, "some still experience racial atrocities, but done in sophisticated guise. It remains a truism that the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s mostly benefited those who were 'up and out.'

"One could not help but note how poorly white Christianity came off in both the book and in the TV presentations," McCall said, noting that the presentation recalled "some very painful moments in my doctoral research.

"The pain," he continued, "was in seeing how the Bible was distorted and twisted by prominent Southern Baptist churchmen in their attempt to appease cultural economics.

"Some of these men are immortalized with buildings and institutions which bear their names. To speak against them would be iconoclastic," McCall declared. "Yet, generations

of Bible believers have been misled by their theological gymnastics while attempting to preserve the status quo. There is a real sense in which 'the fathers have planted sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge,'" he said, in reference to a biblical quotation.

McCall, noting that the televised version of "Roots" omitted some significant facts about the diversity of African blacks, said that some people he has talked with "feel that no human beings could have treated other human beings as cruelly as TV portrayed. Yet, there exists abundances of scholarly research indicating that Haley's portrayal was kind compared to other documents," he said.

"Unfortunately," McCall continued, "many whites have yet to grasp the totality of black experience in America. Through various means blacks have been trying to tell what it's like. We have to communicate with each other. We have talked at, to and around each other. We are not yet communicating substantively."

Wood, calling the institution of slavery and its subsequent discriminatory practices the "most godless and horrifying aspect of American history," said:

"It is painful for blacks to focus on it; it is painful for whites to focus on it. Focus on it we must, however, if we are to understand how we arrived at our present problems and where we must go to deal effectively with them.

"Dealing with this ugly part of our past should not merely invoke some small action which is motivated by guilt," Wood continued. "We have time and again initiated personal and corporate actions on the basis of guilt; but guilt is not an adequate permanent motivator for healing acts and redemptive involvement.

"We must acknowledge again the sins of our collective past and renounce them, but then be determined to move forward on the basis of faith and love and justice and hope," Wood said.

Both Wood and McCall see hope for healing and redemption in race relations.

"God has given Southern Baptists another opportunity to redeem history," said McCall, "and to 'serve this present age.' Never before have we had the spotlight on us as a denomination. We can continue to give our priorities to nebulous goals distanced in the future, or we can set ourselves to the task immediately at hand."

He believes "Roots," although it has evoked a wide range of emotions which need to be dealt with, has given white and black Baptists "a new opportunity to become agents of reconciliation.

"With 11 million black Baptists and 12.9 million Southern Baptists, if we ever could join hands we could truly win this nation for Christ," McCall said. "None of the conventions need lose identity or forsake autonomy to work cooperatively. We will need to forsake false pride, and open ourselves to awareness of each other. We will also need openness to what the Holy Spirit could do through us."

Wood added: "'Roots' can help the nation to cleanse its soul of the racism which is still alive and well in our hearts and in our institutions. The gospel can bring healing to this national sore if the church will let the good news of Jesus Christ do its work. God grant us the courage and wisdom to work now with renewed commitment to secure 'liberty and justice for all.'"



--- FEATURES

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Tangelo Park Baptist Church--
'More than Token Integration'

By Sue Hong

ORLANDO, Fla. (BP)--At the close of a Sunday service, whites and blacks leisurely leave Tangelo Park Baptist Church here, chatting together.

The 15-year-old congregation mirrors its community's black-white mix and is one of the Orlando area's few churches that has managed more than token integration.

With its 250 members about 10 percent white and 90 percent black, Tangelo Park Church's simple building is surrounded by modestly priced, neat houses.

The unincorporated community of about 2,500 persons is estimated to have a 25-75 white-black ratio.

Like its only church, the area's only school also reflects the racial mixing--38 percent of its 730 students are white, as are 27 percent of its 35 teachers.

A Sentinel Star survey shows that most Orlando area white churches have very few black members and that there is little effort to seek black members. Most white pastors said their churches prefer to "let integration take place naturally"--which often means not at all.

Some pastors say integration hasn't taken place because of cultural differences, that blacks and whites use different approaches to their services.

But Tangelo Park Baptist's minister, Herman Brandon, says any differences between black and white services occurred because of segregation.

Churches used to be the only available meeting places for blacks so they became multi-use institutions, said Brandon, a black, retired Air Force chaplain's assistant.

To understand why Tangelo Park Baptist integrated, you have to look at the community's history.

Tangelo Park Church was born in 1961 after Martin Marietta Aerospace opened in Orlando. Bryce Cowher, who came with Martin from Pennsylvania, is a founder of the church and serves as a deacon and superintendent of the Sunday school.

He said Tangelo Park Church was originally an all-white church primarily serving the families of Martin employes.

In the mid-1960s, an integrated U.S. Air Force wing was assigned to McCoy Air Force Base and because of a housing shortage at the base, many of the military families settled in the Tangelo Park area.

The Tangelo Park Church members invited their new neighbors to services and six black families came. That marked the end of church segregation.

In 1971, when the church was without a pastor, the 125-member congregation was half black and half white, Cowher said.

As the Air Force families transferred out and Martin's defense contracts decreased, more black families moved in--attracted by low-priced homes and the apparent success of integration.

At the same time, many white residents moved to seek jobs elsewhere. Others, Cowher said, may have moved to flee the black influx.

Tangelo Park residents interviewed say the mixing has gone well, although some living outside the area say it is plagued by a high crime rate and vacant houses.

An informal comparison of vandalism complaints for Tangelo Park and sections of Pine Hills and Union Park, however, show Tangelo's problem isn't especially serious, according to sheriff's department records.

The 15-member Tangelo Park Civil Patrol, with its own communication system, works with the Orange County Sheriff's Department to keep the area peaceful.

Maj. Ed Wirick, who heads the patrol and has lived here since 1960, says, "Basically, outsiders don't know what they are talking about. We don't have major crimes such as murder, rape or shooting."

He said youths in Tangelo Park are average but that vandalism committed by average white children in white subdivisions often may go unreported while Tangelo Park is watched closely.

Residents say a big cause of Tangelo Park's vandalism is the lack of recreational facilities for young people, a problem that soon may be corrected.

Wirick says some Tangelo Park residents believe the community's heavy influx of blacks is because real estate agents bring only black home-hunters to the neighborhood, a charge the agents deny.

But Mrs. Robert Zurek, wife of the community's civic association president, says she doesn't know of any white families who want to move out because of the heavy black population.

"I know of at least four white families who are adding extra rooms to their homes," she said.

Amid the changing neighborhood, church membership has jumped to about 250 since Brandon's arrival in 1972.

The church sets up its budget according to collections and urges members to donate their time and talent. For example, the members pitched in to clean and upgrade the church and its surrounding area. The grounds are now in ship-shape condition.

The church youth distribute fruit to shut-ins and have collected funds to help alleviate the medical expenses of a neighborhood boy injured in an accident.

Every fifth Sunday, the membership socializes over coffee and cake, Cowher said. In recent years, some of the original members who had moved away have returned to Tangelo.

James Hollis, a white deacon, said he and his wife came back because, "We felt we were needed here."

As to the change in racial ratio of the membership, he said, "I'm color-blind."

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Sue Hong is a staff writer for the Sentinel Star in Orlando, Fla.

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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'Gone With the Wind' Gift
Has Author's Personal Note

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ALEXANDRIA-PINEVILLE, La. (BP)--A gift of Margaret Mitchell's classic novel of the South, "Gone With the Wind," presented to Louisiana College by a former student, contains a personalized, hand-written note from its celebrated author.

Mrs. Ruth Worley Shaffer, a member of the Baptist school's class of 1927, now of Melbourne, Fla., was given the book when she was a nurse for the novelist during a lengthy illness.

The book was given to the college's Richard W. Norton Memorial Library.

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CORRECTION

In the BP mailing of 2-15-77, story headlined, "Okla. Baptists Take 2nd Step Against Pornography," 2nd graph, lines 3-4, Jimmy Allen is immediate past president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio.

THANKS--

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