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Baptists Debate Christian
Responses To War And Peace

By Patti Stephenson

TOCCOA, Ga. (BP)--Two Southern Baptists--one who hones evangelism strategy at the Home Mission Board and another who plots war strategy at the Pentagon--presented opposing views on Christian approaches to peacemaking at the National Renewal Evangelism Conference sponsored by the Home Mission Board.

Dale Cross, director of HMB metropolitan evangelism strategy and Col. Vaughn Johnson from the Pentagon's Crisis Action Center, addressed biblical mandates for peace, pros and cons of nuclear armament and national security versus social needs during a seminar on Christian responsibilities "in a world of war and peace."

Cross said: "Our easy religiosity, our oppressive structures and our spiritual blindness which refuses to learn the things which make for peace has also placed us on a collision course with disaster."

"The tendency among Southern Baptists has been to dismiss those who weep for peace as either soft-headed peaceniks or communist sympathizers. This bias, however, can no longer stand against the escalating cry of millions of God-fearing Americans who are pleading for the madness of the nuclear arms race to stop."

Citing estimates that the nuclear build-up will cost an additional \$42 billion per year, Cross proposed that a nuclear freeze "would make billions available for positive, productive investment in the needs of hungry, impoverished people."

Calling for Baptists to "conform to Christ rather than our culture," Cross decried American society's "incompatible" obsessions with ambition, money and power. "Many American Christians even attribute our own obscene consumption and waste to the blessings and grace of God," he said. "It is because of our malignant desire to protect our privileged position in the world that we are willing to risk the unthinkable specter of nuclear war."

Cross urged Baptists to take biblical instructions to place confidence in the armor of God seriously. "Our defense against the flaming missiles is faith," he said. "However, if we place our trust in the idol of nuclear weapons God's word says we are judged inevitably to use them."

Prayer, the HMB leader noted, "is a potent weapon which turns our enemies into friends." Rather than viewing national enemies as "Krauts, Japs or Commies," he added, "Christians should pray for their redemption."

In response, Johnson said he "feels no conflict of conscience" in his chosen profession as a U.S. Air Force officer. "Peacekeeping is the cornerstone of freedom," he said.

Johnson compared American versus Soviet records of aggression and armament to argue the need for continued U.S. arms build-up. "When we build, they build and when we stop, they keep building," Johnson said. "We have tried turning the other cheek and the bully got stronger."

The Vietnam veteran used biblical history to show the need for "being prepared and staying prepared," describing how a weak Israel was overrun by aggressive enemies.

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Johnson took issue with an "either-or" approach to government provision of social services and national defense. "Pitting a strong security against social needs is false economy," he warned. "We can and must do both."

Noting that "social programs still get more money than defense," the Air Force colonel observed, "We have a tendency to forget the government's most important social service is protection."

Johnson stressed the need to approach negotiations with the Soviets "with our eyes open" from a basis of sufficient strength. "The Soviets must learn that war is not only unthinkable but unwinnable."

Stressing that "I long for the day of beating swords into ploughshares," Johnson then advised, "those who think that time is here could end up conquered."

Johnson said he supports disarmament through comprehensive agreement under international supervision and said negotiations must address both conventional and nuclear weapons.

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Texas Governor-Elect
Is Baptist Christian

By Orville Scott

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DALLAS (BP)--Texas' Governor-Elect Mark White is described by his pastor at Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, as an active Baptist and "a man of his word" who will "stand for what's right in the Christian sense."

The 42-year-old White, who succeeds Bill Clements as governor of Texas in January, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1962 and a doctor of jurisprudence degree in 1965 from Baylor University. He worked his way through school waiting tables and doing similar jobs.

White and his wife, Linda Gale, joined Hyde Park Baptist Church when Gov. Dolph Briscoe appointed him secretary of state in 1973. He was elected attorney general in 1978.

Hyde Park Pastor Ralph Smith described the Whites as a model family.

"You can detect a deep love flowing through their family," said Smith, a former president of the 2.2-million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Smith said he recently baptized the White's 10-year-old son, Andrew, after his parents led him to the Lord.

The new governor and his wife also have another son, Mark Wells White III, 12, and a daughter, Elizabeth, 8.

Another observation on the White family was voiced by Mary Hardesty, assistant for information to the attorney general.

"They really live their religion on a daily basis in the way they treat people and in their devotion to each other and their country and state," said Hardesty.

White's pastor commended him for his interest in people, his commitment to the local church and his forthrightness.

"He (White) is quick to say he's a Christian and a Baptist," said Smith.

"He and his wife are both warm and personable. He will call you by your first name the second time he meets you. He's always terribly busy, but if he's in the office he always returns my calls immediately.

"He is a man of his word who will do what he says he will do."

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White is the fourth Baylor graduate to serve as governor of Texas. Others were Price Daniel Sr., Pat M. Neff and Lawrence S. (Sul) Ross.

White is on the advisory council of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and is a former member of the Texas Baptist Christian Education Coordinating Board, the advisory committee of the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Belton, and the board of directors of Baylor Alumni Association.

One of White's campaign leaders, Austin realtor Roy Kimble of Highland Park Baptist Church, said the new governor is a strong advocate of church-state separation but has indicated a strong desire for input into the governmental process by both clergy and laity.

According to Tommy Turner at Baylor, other top officials who are Baptists include Attorney General Jim Mattox, Comptroller Bob Bullock and Treasurer Ann Richards.

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Historical Knowledge
Needed, Shurden Says

By Linda Lawson

Baptist Press
11/5/82

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--While Southern Baptists have never had an acute case of historical consciousness, they need a knowledge of their heritage today as never before, according to a church historian.

"We are a people who would rather make history than study history," said Walter Shurden, professor of church history and dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky. He led a one-day seminar for 100 employees of the Sunday School Board on relating to the diversity of Southern Baptists.

Citing geographical, sociological, educational and theological differences, Shurden said, "Going from one church in one part of the country to another in another part of the country can be like moving from one denomination to another. Anyone who has tramped around in Baptist life knows pluralism and diversity are present."

He emphasized Bible study should continue to be the top priority in educational efforts. "We are a people of the book, as we should be. But I have become convinced that effective study of scripture must be done with an awareness of how history has affected our views of scripture. Our people do not read scripture through glasses that are uncolored," Shurden said.

Shurden said members of the 13.8-million member denomination need a knowledge of their history to better understand several contemporary forces eroding their heritage and at least two current issues which represent deviation from the past.

Among eroding forces, Shurden cited the evangelical resurgence, charismatic movement and interdenominational student movements which draw allegiances toward themselves and away from any denomination.

He also noted many Southern Baptist ministers are receiving their college and/or seminary educations outside of Southern Baptist institutions.

"Historically, Southern Baptists have been capable of 'denominationalizing' our people through church educational programs and seminaries. If we lose this we will lose a Southern Baptist consciousness, if not commitment," he emphasized.

He also warned the so-called electronic church is drawing allegiances of persons away from denominations. "If we do not capture television as Southern Baptists we are going to be in trouble," he said.

Among current deviations from Southern Baptist heritage, Shurden listed a willingness to abandon traditional stands on separation of church and state and the priesthood of all believers. "We ought to be teaching the individual exercise of ministry within the church community but we are not at the point of turning our minds and souls over to authoritarian personalities," he said.

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Shurden observed that a knowledge of history also is important because the denomination has experienced changes in top leadership positions in most of its institutions and many key pulpits. Calling this era a "generational crease," he said, "at no point in Southern Baptist history is our heritage as important as it is right now."

He praised recent efforts of the board's church training department to emphasize history and heritage. He called for increased efforts to personalize Baptist history through its leaders and to present it in an attractive, interesting format.

"We've got to find new ways to reach heritage and to teach it when our people are at church--from the pulpit as well as in the classroom," he said.

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'Excitement, Optimism'
Reported In Mid-East Tour

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press
11/5/82

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--In the troubled Middle East, there is "a growing sense of excitement and expectation among Baptists," R. Keith Parks said as he returned from a 19-day trip through the region.

Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, and his wife, Helen Jean, met with Southern Baptist representatives and Baptist leaders in Lebanon, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, where the couple also met with Jordan's American-born Queen Noor Al Hussein. They also visited Baptist work in three countries of South Asia.

Parks said he found among Baptists "in every place a growing sense of excitement and expectation," along with continuing pressures. "You always came away aware of the problems, complexities and barriers and yet at the same time the overarching impression is one of growth, of optimism, of expectation."

In Israel Parks found the Oct. 7 burning of West Jerusalem Baptist Church to be "the widest-known event related to Baptists in all of the Middle East." The work of an arsonist, the burning drew widespread media coverage and expressions of regret from Israeli citizens and government leaders.

The congregation, led by Pastor Robert Lindsey, Southern Baptist representative, is completing a temporary shelter for worship pending rebuilding of the damaged sanctuary.

Lindsey said the burning has continued to draw a "tremendous outpouring of love and concern by Jewish neighbors and friends" and that the church has received numerous contributions for reconstruction. The fire has also prompted a "general outcry against religious extremism," according to the Israeli weekly magazine Newsview.

Police suspect the fire was set either by Jewish extremists or Moslem or Christian arsonists hoping to damage interfaith cooperation in Jerusalem. Two suspects arrested after the fire, however, were released for lack of evidence.

In Jordan Parks thanked Queen Noor Al Hussein for Southern Baptists' continuing opportunity to serve Jordan through Baptist schools and medical work in Amman and Ajloun. He assured her Baptists pray for the royal family daily. "She was visibly moved when we told her of the prayers," Parks said.

Recent articles in the Jordanian press have portrayed pro-Israel statements of some Southern Baptists and other evangelical leaders as anti-Jordanian and anti-Arab. Parks told the Queen such reports "represented statements of individuals" and the interpretation of a statement of support for Israel as anti-Arab was "not necessarily accurate."

He stressed such statements do not represent the view of Southern Baptist missionaries and representatives in the Middle East, many of whom work in Arab communities.

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The mission leader said he was surprised by coverage the press in that region gives to Baptist affairs and by Arab sensitivity to those reports. "It underscored for me the caution with which we need to express anything about the Middle East," he said. "That's a good lesson for me and for all of us. We need to express ourselves in a way that's inclusive and not exclusive."

In battle-scarred West Beirut, Parks visited the newly renovated Beirut Baptist School which was set to reopen the second week of November with some 600 students. Slightly damaged by a bomb and looting during the Israeli-Palestinian fighting, the school housed refugees and a clinic coordinated by Southern Baptist missionary Jim Ragland while the Israeli army occupied the city.

"I sensed among the missionaries and national leaders the feeling that, because of all that has happened, there is an opportunity for ministry that surpasses anything we've had in the past," Parks said. "They're finding the people responding to the fact they do find a sense of worth as they respond to Christ. Many of them do not have anything that gives them identity and a sense of belonging" in a hostile environment.

The mission executive described Beirut Baptist churches as "going along at a fantastic pace." A church meeting in a rented apartment seating 75 drew 175 worshippers the Sunday he attended. "They filled all the outer rooms and were hanging out the windows," he said.

Lebanese Baptist Convention leader Ghassan Khalaf told Parks he is convinced "we're on the edge of a revival for all of this part of the world."

The Parkses also met with Baptist leaders in Egypt where the couple's son and daughter-in-law, Randall and Nancy Parks, are Southern Baptist representatives. Earlier stops on the trip included India, Bangladesh and Thailand.

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Church Members
Show 'Good Standing'

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11/5/82

CHICAGO (BP)--A record number of members of the Faith Tabernacle Baptist Church registered to vote in this fall's state and national elections.

"Early this fall I announced if our folks expected to receive a new membership card January 1, and also be issued 1983 offering envelopes, they would need to show their voter registration cards," Pastor Don Sharp said.

Sharp, newly-elected president of the Illinois Baptist State Association, said in some black churches--including the one he serves--it is customary to issue cards each January 1, certifying that a member is in good status.

"Some of our members registered to vote for the first time," Sharp said, "and others needed a reminder to update their registration since they had moved into a new voting precinct."

He had hoped election officials could set up a registration booth inside the church but their request got in too late.

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