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Southern Baptist Clinton calls  
for sacrifice at inauguration

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
1/21/93

WASHINGTON (BP)--William Jefferson Clinton, taking office as the 42nd president of the United States and the third Southern Baptist to govern from the White House, pronounced the beginning of a "new season of American renewal" which would require sacrifice from the country's citizens.

The "urgent question of our time is whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy," Clinton said in his Jan. 20 inaugural speech. The economy, crime and the plight of children indicate "we have not made change our friend," Clinton said.

"We know we have to face hard truths and take strong steps, but we have not done so," the former governor of Arkansas said. "Instead, we have drifted.

"There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America," said Clinton, a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark.

"It will not be easy. It will require sacrifice, but it can be done and done fairly, not choosing sacrifice for its own sake but for our sake."

While the new president called for Americans to embrace change, evangelist Billy Graham requested in an inaugural prayer a change of heart produced by God.

Americans "cannot say that we are a righteous people, for we are not," Graham said in his invocation at the ceremony. "We have sinned against you. We have sown to the wind and are now reaping a whirlwind of crime, drug abuse, racism, immorality and social injustice. We need to repent of our sins and turn by faith to you."

Graham, like Clinton, is a member of a Southern Baptist church, First Baptist in Dallas.

Clinton, who first joined a Southern Baptist church as a child in Hot Springs, Ark., became the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter to serve as president. Carter, who attended the ceremony with his wife, Rosalynn, also is a Southern Baptist. Harry Truman was a Southern Baptist, too. The only other president identified as a Baptist was Warren Harding, who was not Southern Baptist.

The new vice president, Al Gore, also is a Southern Baptist. He and his family are members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Va.

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Clinton and Gore's support for abortion and homosexual rights has brought clear opposition from many of their fellow church members in the country's largest non-Catholic denomination. At least 11 state Southern Baptists conventions passed resolutions in fall meetings expressing disagreement with their positions.

While largely avoiding discussion of precise policies, Clinton's 14-minute address before about 250,000 persons on the west side of the U.S. Capitol called on Americans to change the country and to serve others. On a winter day, he said, they can "force the spring."

"Thomas Jefferson believed that to preserve the very foundations of our nation, we would need dramatic change from time to time," Clinton said. "Well, my fellow Americans, this is our time. Let us embrace it."

He challenged young Americans to accept a "season of service," recommending troubled children, the needy and communities in upheaval as recipients of their help.

"In serving we recognize a simple but powerful truth: We need each other, and we must care for one another," Clinton said.

As America stands on the verge of the 21st century, he said, "let us begin anew with energy and hope, with faith and discipline, and let us work until our work is done."

"The Scripture says, 'And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not,'" Clinton said, quoting Galatians 6:9.

"From this joyful mountaintop of celebration, we hear a call to service in the valley. We have heard the trumpet. We have changed the guard. And now, each in our own way and with God's help, we must answer the call."

Echoing frequent campaign themes, Clinton called for investing in people, cutting the debt and not expecting something in return.

"We must do what America does best -- offer opportunity to all and demand more responsibility from all," he said.

"It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing, from our government or from each other."

A changed America also must meet the challenge of an unstable international climate, Clinton said.

"Clearly, America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make," he said.

"When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary," Clinton said, signaling again his apparent willingness to act militarily as Presidents Reagan and Bush had in the previous 12 years.

In his invocation, Graham thanked God "for the moral and spiritual foundation" of the country and prayed for Clinton and Gore, "whom you have permitted to take leadership at this critical time in our nation's history."

"Help them always to see the office to which they have been elected as a sacred trust from you," Graham prayed. May the new president "know that he is never really alone, but that the eternal God can be his refuge, and he can turn to you in every circumstance. Give him the wisdom you have promised to those who ask and the strength you alone can give."

He also asked "that the memory of this event always remind us to pray for our leaders."

Graham, who was participating in inauguration activities for the sixth time, had been asked by some pro-life activists not to pray at the ceremony because of Clinton's positions on abortion and homosexual rights.

Graham also delivered the benediction, which came shortly after poet Maya Angelou, in a poem commissioned by Clinton, mentioned "The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher" in one line of a list of 20 groups comprising America's diverse society.

The Clinton and Gore families began the day at an inaugural prayer service after closing the evening before with a worship service at First Baptist Church in Washington.

Draper urges prayer  
for Clinton, Gore

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE (BP)--Southern Baptists who voted for Bill Clinton and those who opposed him now have a shared biblical obligation to pray for the nation's 42nd president, James T. Draper Jr. said.

Draper, president of the Baptist Sunday School Board, writing in his monthly column in the February issue of Facts and Trends, noted President Bill Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore Jr. are both members of Southern Baptist churches, a first.

"Doubtless, Southern Baptists split in their vote for the presidency just as the nation as a whole did. There have been and continue to be many areas of concern each of us has about the future of our country and the approach that is taken to leadership and governing. That is nothing new. Politics has always been a diverse matter and has resulted in many different opinions," Draper said.

"However, there is one truth that transcends all of the differences of this election: God is still God and he still governs the affairs of men," he added.

"So what should be our response to this election of two fellow Southern Baptists to the highest elected positions in this land?" Draper asked. "There are some who strongly support President Clinton and Vice President Gore. Others are strongly critical and hostile. So, what shall we do? Shall we complain and condemn if we disagree with them? Shall we praise and support if we agree?"

Citing Scripture verses 1 Timothy 2:1-4, Draper said the Bible "instructs us to pray for those in positions of leadership and authority."

Also, he said Christians are to include the personal needs of leaders in their prayers and to pray from a sense of reverence and worship for God. "As we pray for our president and vice president, we are actually reverencing and worshipping our Heavenly Father."

From the verses, Draper said it is clear Christians can approach God confidently when they are praying for leaders and including gratitude to God for their leadership.

"Those in authority are God's instruments for order and blessing for a society. We are to pray with grateful hearts," he said.

"We are admonished in these verses to pray for all in authority," Draper continued. "The reason is not just for their benefit, but that we may have lives that are free from outward disturbances, political agitation and persecution."

The result of prayer by Christians for their leaders is a "peaceable life," a society of "godliness and honesty. These words speak of the fulfilling of our duty toward God and our respect for our fellow citizens. As we do this, we will have an atmosphere in which God's desire for all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth can be best fulfilled," he said.

Draper called on the 2,050 Southern Baptist churches participating in the Watchmen National Prayer Alert to make Clinton and Gore objects of prayer. These churches have committed to pray one hour per week at designated times and then to communicate with the church that begins praying as they conclude.

"As these churches pray, our president and vice president will become the objects of prayer seven days a week, 24 hours a day," Draper said.

In addition to publishing the editorial which will reach about 60,000 SBC, state, associational and church leaders, copies were delivered to Clinton and Gore.

"No politician or political party will be the solution to the problems that face this nation," Draper said. "Only the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ reigning in the hearts of our citizens will effectively meet the complex problems and matters that are confronting us today."

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The complete text of the editorial is available on SBCNet or by fax from the Sunday School Board bureau of Baptist Press.

EDITORS' NOTE: The two stories that follow explore Protestant/Baptist growth in Latin America and may be used as a series or individually.

Protestant growth brings  
change in Latin America

By Mary E. Speidel

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (BP)--Historian Arnaldo Canclini has made history in Argentina as the first Protestant invited to join a national academic society.

Canclini, also an Argentine Baptist pastor, recently was named to the National Academy of History, one of 16 societies honoring Argentina's leaders in the arts, sciences and other disciplines.

Ten years ago he never dreamed he would be named to the prestigious academy, whose membership is largely Roman Catholic. "It's really a high honor for the whole evangelical population," said Canclini, who has written more than 60 books, many on Protestant history.

The achievement suggests Protestants are gaining wider acceptance in the traditionally Roman Catholic country. "This may mean Protestants are now being seen more as a part of the nation and the nation's past," said Canclini, a pastor in Buenos Aires, the capital.

The honor points to a broader cultural shift in Latin America, where Roman Catholicism has been the major religion for four centuries. "Evangelicals are still a minority, but they're now an accepted minority," said Betty Law, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's vice president for the Americas who retired Jan. 15. "They're no longer looked on as a rare breed."

Since the late 1960s, the region's evangelical population has soared from 15 million to more than 40 million people, according to Time magazine. Christianity Today reports that some observers say Latin America is becoming Protestant more rapidly than central Europe did during the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

In fact, some scholars believe evangelicals could become a majority in Latin America if the current growth rate continues. A third of the region's population could be evangelical by the year 2010, predicts anthropologist David Stoll in his book "Is Latin America Turning Protestant?"

But some scholars call such assessments unrealistic. "It's easy to get the impression that because there are well-known evangelical success stories in certain countries that therefore this is some kind of steamroller or snowball effect," said researcher David Barrett, consultant at the Foreign Mission Board's world evangelization research center.

Barrett said many who write on this subject cite statistics that do not reflect the growth of all "evangelicals" -- Christians who emphasize new life, rebirth, conversion, baptism, the Great Commission, the Lord's Supper, Christ's second coming and the Bible.

These widely reported statistics actually show Protestant growth, not total evangelical growth, in Latin America, Barrett said. In fact, millions of Catholics call themselves "evangelicals," such as those in the growing charismatic Catholic movement in the region, he added.

That kind of statistical misinterpretation isn't anything new, Barrett said. In fact, researchers in the late 1960s made some of the same assessments scholars today make about the region's Protestant growth, he said.

Barrett believes it's correct to say Christianity in general is "exploding in Latin America but added "it's been exploding for a long time, over the past 100 years."

He cited statistics to support that view. During the past century Protestant evangelicals alone have grown steadily from 760,000 in 1900 to 18 million in the mid-1980s with a projected total of 34 million by the year 2000. Christians in the region -- encompassing everyone from Roman Catholics to Baptists to Pentecostals -- have grown from 62 million in 1900 to 392 million in the mid 1980s. The Christian population in Latin America is expected to be 571 million by the year 2,000 -- 92 percent of the entire population.

Barrett said recent growth in Latin America is greatest among the charismatic movement in mainline churches -- including Catholics in Latin America -- followed by Pentecostals and Baptists.

No matter how growth statistics are compiled and analyzed, most observers agree a religious awakening is occurring in Latin America. "There's a spiritual hunger in Latin America," said Jim Slack, church growth analyst at the Foreign Mission Board. "Spiritually speaking, it's their time."

And in the midst of that awakening, Protestant evangelicals find increased social acceptance. "All kinds of evidence indicates the stigma of being an evangelical is waning," said Bill Goff, who directs Foreign Mission Board work in Spanish South America.

Politics is one evidence. In 1991 Jorge Serrano Elias, a Pentecostal, was the first Protestant elected as president of Guatemala. He's not the first one to serve as president of a Latin American country but there's a growing Protestant influence in politics of the region. Serrano's vice president and about a fourth of the Congress also are Protestants, who make up more than 30 percent of Guatemala's population, according to some researchers.

In 1990 Carlos Garcia, a Baptist, became second vice president of Peru, running on a ticket with presidential winner Alberto Fujimori, a Roman Catholic. About one-third of the congressional candidates who ran on Fujimori's slate are Protestants.

In many Latin American countries, Protestants are organizing political parties. Examples include the Independent Christian Movement in Argentina and a party in Venezuela called "Ora," Spanish for prayer.

While Protestants seem to be gaining ground, some observers say the Roman Catholic Church is growing increasingly weaker. About 400 Roman Catholics per hour switch to Protestant groups, according to news reports.

Barrett describes a different scenario: While Protestants are growing, so is the Roman Catholic Church, both through demographic growth and new evangelistic efforts.

Such practices support Pope John Paul's recent appeal to Latin bishops for a new focus on evangelism. He spoke against liberation theology, begun by Latin priests in the late 1960s as a theology of social and political change.

The pope also addressed the rapid growth of Protestants in the region, saying Roman Catholics have fallen prey to "ravenous wolves" of Protestant "sects." He urged bishops to guard their flocks.

Meanwhile, some Protestants in parts of Latin America -- particularly in Mexico -- cite increasing instances of persecution by Roman Catholics. Abuses against Protestants in some areas have included threats, vandalism and murder, according to news reports.

In Mexico the persecution has been perpetrated by those who practice a syncretistic form of Catholicism that includes animism and ancient religious traditions, according to a report in Christianity Today.

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(BP) graphic (horizontal) mailed Jan. 20 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Outline copy incorporated in graphic.

Growth brings challenges  
for Latin American Baptists

By Mary E. Speidel

Baptist Press  
1/21/93

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Latin American Baptists related to Southern Baptist foreign missions currently have the greatest potential for growth among overseas Baptists but face great challenges in achieving that potential.

That's the view of Jim Slack, church growth analyst at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Richmond, Va.

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Baptist growth statistics in Latin America mirror the trend of broader Protestant growth in the region, according to Slack. The number of Protestants in traditionally Roman Catholic Latin America has nearly tripled in the last 30 years, according to news reports.

Most of that increase has been among Pentecostals with Baptists second in most of the region, Slack said. "Where Pentecostals are growing, we (Baptists) are growing as well. ... We've all found the hot spots," he said.

Baptist growth in Latin America has been a "sustained, continuous growth with spurts" in certain areas, added Joe Bruce, who directs Foreign Mission Board work in Central America. "We haven't shown explosive growth like some of the newer charismatic groups," said Bruce, who became the board's interim vice president for the Americas Jan. 16.

Among overseas Baptists, Brazil reported the top number of members, with 720,703, and churches, with 4,492, in 1991. It ranked third in new Baptist church starts, with 177. Statistics for 1992 are not yet available.

Besides Brazil, some of the strongest growth has occurred in Mexico and Guatemala, Slack said. These countries, along with Peru and Argentina, reported the region's most new church starts among Baptists in 1991.

Compared to overseas Baptists in other regions, Baptists in the board's Americas region -- including Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada -- reported the top number of preaching points in 1991. That figure -- 14,366 -- exceeds totals reported by overseas Baptists in all other regions combined.

But raw totals alone don't reflect the whole church growth story.

For example, Baptists in the Americas reported the most preaching points but formed the second lowest number of new churches -- 322 -- among overseas Baptists by region. These preaching points matured into new churches at a rate of 2.4 percent. A good maturity rate would range from 18 to 25 percent, Slack said.

By contrast, Baptist preaching points in the Africa region showed a maturity rate of 19.9 percent, with 3,865 preaching points and 789 new churches; the Asia and the Pacific region, an 18.6 percent rate, with 3,755 preaching points and 456 new churches; and Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, a 1.9 percent rate, with 750 preaching points and nine new churches. (The 1991 statistics do not include Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.)

Based on number of preaching points alone, "Baptists in the Americas have the greatest potential for growth of all regions of the world. No question about it," Slack said. But the low rate of preaching points maturing into new congregations poses a serious threat to achieving that potential, he believes.

One reason for the low maturity rate is what's known as the "back door," he said. Church growth analysts use that term to describe converts who leave a congregation or become nominal members, often because they are not adequately nurtured through discipleship and leadership training.

However, some Baptist conventions in Latin America, such as Venezuelan Baptists, boast model discipleship programs. They have done such a good job in training their ranks in the MasterLife discipleship program that other evangelical groups ask them for training, said Bill Goff, who directs the board's work in Spanish South America.

And compared to other overseas Baptists, Latin American Baptists report some of the strongest Sunday school programs, Slack said. But their "Sunday school isn't being used as effectively as it could and should be used" as an evangelistic tool, he said.

Despite success stories, some estimates indicate Latin American Baptist churches lose as many as 50 percent of their members out the "back door."

"What this means for Baptist work in the region is that we're going to have to put more emphasis on discipleship and leadership training on all levels," said Betty Law, Foreign Mission Board vice president for the Americas who retired Jan. 15.

Another problem is a shortage of trained leaders to guide the large number of mission congregations in the region. Compounding this problem is the fact that Baptists in some Latin America countries prefer their pastors to be seminary trained and not lay pastors, according to Slack and Law. This limits the pool of potential pastors.

Besides these issues, Baptists lose members to increasingly popular charismatic groups -- including charismatic Roman Catholics. "Latin Americans want their religion to have an emotional aspect," said Slack, and charismatic worship offers a certain emotional appeal. Some current and prospective Baptist church members join charismatic groups because they don't find that emotional element in some Baptist worship styles, according to Slack.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to Baptist and all Protestant growth in Latin America, Slack believes, is the rise of spiritism, a long-time influence there. Afro-Brazilian cults such as Macumba and Umbanda and other forms of the occult have established a stronghold in Brazil and are spreading rapidly across the region, especially into Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and parts of Central America, he said.

Latin America currently is very responsive to spiritual influences, and spiritists show the same "hot spots" of growth as Baptists and other evangelicals, Slack said.

"Spiritists are harvesting the crop, too," he said. "It's a force to be reckoned with. The occult is alive and well in Latin America."

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(BP) photo (horizontal) mailed Jan. 20 to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press. Cutline available on SBCNet Newsroom.

San Francisco church leaves SBC  
over SBC's anti-homosexuality stand

Baptist Press  
1/21/93

SAN FRANCISCO (BP)--A small but historic congregation in San Francisco has voted to leave the Southern Baptist Convention over the SBC's stance against church actions affirming homosexuality.

Dolores Street Baptist Church severed ties with the SBC effective Jan. 10, according to a news release from the congregation's pastor, Marilyn Chilcote.

The church was founded 50 years ago as First Southern Baptist Church of San Francisco.

In 1981, Dolores Street adopted a statement welcoming all persons "to minister" through the congregation, and the California Southern Baptist Convention and the San Francisco/Peninsula Southern Baptist Association subsequently severed ties with the congregation. The SBC Home Mission Board later withdrew funding to various church ministries. Even so, the news release stated, the church continued to send "a small amount" to the SBC's Cooperative Program for national and international missions and ministry.

Now, however, Dolores Street is severing its ties to the SBC because, it said, the SBC "is no longer the convention that we used to know." The congregation cited the SBC's action last year to disfellowship two North Carolina churches -- one which licensed a homosexual to the ministry and another which performed a marriage-like ceremony for two homosexual men -- and to amend the SBC constitution to bar from the SBC churches which affirm the homosexual lifestyle.

"The convention's recent actions have not only strayed but also totally contradicted Baptist tradition," the church claimed. "Up to now, there has always been room for a variety of perspectives and viewpoints on complex social and ethical issues."

To date, news reports have appeared on three churches -- in Houston, Washington, and Dolores Street -- that have left the SBC over the SBC's anti-homosexuality stance and one church, in Indiana, that joined the SBC as a result of the SBC actions.

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Missouri governor, a Baptist,  
boosts schools, is pro-choice

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (BP)--Missouri's new governor, Baptist layman Mel Carnahan, has listed education and jobs as his top priorities and, in an interview with a Baptist newsjournal, identified himself as pro-choice in the nation's abortion debate.

Carnahan, a member of First Baptist Church in Rolla, Mo., since 1959, has been a deacon, Sunday school teacher, committee chairman and choir member, reported the Word & Way, the state's Southern Baptist newsjournal.

A Democrat, Carnahan was elected Missouri's lieutenant governor in 1988 and state treasurer in 1980. He was an unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1984. Earlier, Carnahan was a municipal judge in Rolla, then a member of the Missouri House of Representatives.

During his Jan. 12 inauguration, Carnahan introduced his mission as governor referring to his great-grandfather, a Methodist minister and pioneer of the Missouri frontier.

"There was a worn place on his Bible where the book rested on his saddle horn. That worn place was not only the mark of that man's endurance, but the mark of his mission," said Carnahan, who used that Bible in taking the oath of office. "We face a different frontier today. The production of this country rests not on the backs of our men and women, but on their minds -- minds educated to think and judge."

Calling for "world-class schools" in Missouri, where only one in four high school students graduates, Carnahan said education remains "the shortest distance between where we are and where we dream to be."

In an interview with the Word & Way, Carnahan said he opposes further restrictions on abortion in Missouri.

Asked if he feels "totally comfortable" with that position as a Christian and a Southern Baptist, Carnahan said, "I certainly do. I would say to you that I am prayerfully and deliberately pro-choice."

Currently, state law requires a 24-hour waiting period for abortions and, for women under age 18, notification of at least one parent. Missouri also prohibits state funding for "non-therapeutic" abortions or for counseling regarding abortion.

Commenting on the "born-again" tag applied to former President Jimmy Carter, Carnahan told the Word & Way he also is born again "but I don't like the emphasis on the term. I think it's a private matter and I think they made fun of us about it."

Of his faith, Carnahan said, "I think it's given me an anchor when there are lots of fluid uncertainties. It's given me a hope that God really does work in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. I've had crushing defeats politically, but I was not personally defeated."

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