
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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New president's call for renewal
reflects broad religious values

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Sounding a call for national renewal, newly inaugurated President William Jefferson Clinton challenged Americans to "work until our work is done."

Clinton, the second Baptist president in the past two decades, followed that challenge with a reminder of a scriptural promise: "And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9).

While that was the most overtly religious reference in the 14-minute Jan. 20 inaugural address, broad religious values underpinned many elements of Clinton's call for renewal -- such values as service, sacrifice, concern for the poor and powerless, change, caring and personal responsibility.

Clinton's friends and fellow church members in his native Arkansas say a genuine, personal faith underlies his commitment to public service, but Clinton did not use his religious faith for political advantage during his campaign for the White House.

Clinton took the oath of office as the nation's 42nd president with his hand on a Bible given to him by his grandmother. The King James version was open to another verse from Galatians: "For he that soweth to the flesh shall reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Galatians 6:8).

In his address, delivered on a remarkably sunny winter day in Washington, Clinton said by voting for a change in government Americans "have forced the spring" of renewal. However, the road to renewal will not be easy, he said, and will require sacrifice.

"But it can be done, and done fairly, not choosing sacrifice for its own sake, but for our own sake," he said. "We must provide for our nation the way a family provides for its children."

Americans should judge themselves in light of their children's future, he said.

"Anyone who has ever watched a child's eyes wander into sleep knows what

posterity is," Clinton said. "Posterity is the world to come -- the world for whom we hold our ideals, from whom we have borrowed our planet and to whom we bear sacred responsibility.

"We must do what America does best: offer more opportunity to all and demand responsibility from all," he told a crowd of about 500,000 gathered on the west side of the U.S. Capitol.

Clinton, 46, challenged "a new generation of young Americans to a season of service -- to act on your idealism by helping troubled children, keeping company with those in need, reconnecting our torn communities.

"There is so much to be done -- enough indeed for millions of others who are still young in spirit to give of themselves in service too," he said. "In serving, we recognize a simple but powerful truth -- we need each other. And we must care for one another."

Clinton said the nation must be willing to embrace change, "not change for change's sake, but change to preserve America's ideals -- life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness."

With powerful forces "shaking and remaking our world," Clinton said, "the urgent question of our time is whether we can make change our friend and not our enemy....

"When most people are working harder for less; when others cannot work at all; when the cost of health care devastates families and threatens to bankrupt many of our enterprises, great and small; when fear of crime robs law-abiding citizens of their freedom; and when millions of poor children cannot even imagine the lives we are calling them to lead -- we have not made change our friend," he said.

The former Arkansas governor cited Thomas Jefferson's belief that the nation occasionally needs dramatic change.

"Well, my fellow citizens," Clinton said, "this is our time. Let us embrace it.

"Our democracy must be not only the envy of the world but the engine of our own renewal. There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America."

Clinton and fellow Southern Baptist Albert Gore Jr., 44, assumed the nation's highest offices in ceremonies that included prayers by evangelist Billy Graham, solos by soprano Marilyn Horne and a poem written for the occasion and delivered by Arkansas native Maya Angelou, a poet and professor of American studies at Wake Forest University.

Graham prayed that Clinton and Gore would "see the office to which they have been elected as a sacred trust" from God. The 74-year-old evangelist, who was asked by conservative religious leaders critical of Clinton's views not to participate in the inauguration, also prayed that the nation's citizens would long remember the challenges offered by Clinton and dedicate themselves to meeting them.

Clinton and Gore, the first two Baptists to hold the nations' top offices simultaneously, have been active members of Baptist congregations. Clinton is a member of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock and the Gores are members of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Va.

Three religious services were included in a packed schedule of events for the Clintons and Gores during inaugural week. Sunday, en route to Washington, they worshiped at historic Culpeper (Va.) Baptist Church. They also attended a late-night Baptist service Jan. 19 sponsored by the Baptist Joint Committee and First Baptist Church of Washington and an ecumenical service early Jan. 20 at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington.

On inauguration eve, Baptists gather
to pray with Clintons, Gores

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Bill Clinton and Al Gore ushered in their Inauguration Day with prayer, worship and a tribute to the Baptist faith they share.

About 12 hours before they took office, the new president and vice president attended a late-night worship service with some of their Baptist brethren.

The pre-inaugural prayer meeting, which attracted about 1,000 invited guests representing various Baptist groups from across the nation, was hosted by First Baptist Church of Washington. The church is located eight blocks from the White House. From 1977 to 1981, it was home church to the last Baptist president, Jimmy Carter, who also attended the Jan. 19-20 service.

The service was sponsored jointly by the church and the Baptist Joint Committee, a religious-liberty agency representing several Baptist groups, until recently including the Southern Baptist Convention.

The two sponsors offered to arrange the service for Clinton and Gore, who are both Southern Baptists. Everett Goodwin, pastor of the host church, said the service was suggested to inauguration planners as a time of worship and reflection from a Baptist perspective. The offer "managed to catch (Clinton's) eye, and he said 'yes'," Goodwin said.

Less than seven hours after leaving the Baptist prayer service, Clinton and Gore were again in prayer, this time at the 8 a.m. interfaith service at Washington's historic Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Although Clinton and Gore attended both services with their families, neither spoke to the gatherings.

According to James Dunn, BJC executive director, Clinton said he did not want the Baptist event to turn into a photo opportunity. "He wanted to pray," Dunn said.

Clinton is a member at Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., a Southern Baptist congregation, while Gore belongs to Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, a suburban Washington church aligned both with the SBC and American Baptist Churches, USA.

Their election marked the first time two Southern Baptists -- or two people from any one denomination -- were elected to the nation's two highest offices.

Guests at the prayer service included representatives of the 10 denominations to which the BJC relates, said Dunn. Absent from the guest list were top leaders of the 15 million-member Southern Baptist Convention. During the campaign, some SBC leaders were critical of Clinton's positions on abortion and homosexual rights.

Last year the SBC terminated its relationship with the BJC, an agency it helped establish 55 years ago. Earlier the SBC had defunded the agency and transferred the denomination's church/state assignment to the SBC Christian Life Commission.

Many other Southern Baptists, however, were present at the service. Those invited included pastors, selected Baptist state convention executives, seven Baptist state newspaper editors and retired SBC agency heads.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a group of Southern Baptists dissatisfied with the current conservative direction of the SBC, was represented. Fellowship moderator Pat Ayres read scripture on the program.

The congregation braved long lines in sub-freezing temperatures while

awaiting security clearance before the three-hour service, which started at 10 p.m. The Clinton and Gore families joined the service in progress, arriving in formal evening wear from a nationally televised black-tie gala in suburban Landover, Md.

The church remained open following the 1:20 a.m. adjournment for a prayer vigil lasting until 8 a.m., when the interfaith prayer service opened the official inauguration ceremonies.

The Baptist program featured Clinton's home church choir, of which he has been a faithful member, and fellow Baptists prominent in public life.

Bill Moyers, PBS broadcaster and former White House staff member under President Lyndon Johnson, commended Clinton's Baptist tradition as a laboratory for democratic leadership. Though he no longer attends a Baptist church, Moyers described his own Baptist upbringing as "so much a part of my story that I would not be able to explain myself to my grandson without it."

From Baptists, Moyers said, "I learned about honesty,...frailty and forgiveness" and "rough-and-tumble democracy."

The hallmark of Baptist faith, Moyers said, is soul competency, the concept that "we are endowed with the capacity to choose." That freedom accounts for the Baptist diversity demonstrated in the 27 different Baptist groups in the nation.

"Baptists have been on the left of the American establishment and they have been on the right," he said. "Jesse Jackson is a Baptist. So is Jesse Helms."

Moyers told Clinton that his Baptist, free-church tradition is "one of the best gifts you will bring to taking office in this most pluralistic, fragmented time in our history."

Baptists' historic insistence on the separation of church and state does not mandate the "hermetic expulsion of religion from politics," Moyers said. He urged Clinton and Gore to lead the nation beyond "dead practice and tired beliefs" to "a renewed sense of religion and politics as a call to service."

He also urged Clinton to call on his faith as a resource. "Tomorrow is when the real struggle begins," he said. "The hardest struggle of all is the struggle within."

Moyers said that while leaders are a reflection of their society, the opposite can also be true. "The character of a government is formed every day in the soul of a leader," he said.

Former president Carter's name did not appear on the printed program, but he was invited to speak. He joked about the opportunity to "ad lib before the very first Democratic president I will meet in my life" and reminisced about his own experiences at First Baptist Church, where he is still an associate member. "When you're in the White House as the president of this great nation, a church family means a lot to you," Carter said.

When he moved to Washington, Carter said he considered retaining his membership at his church in Plains, Ga. Instead he took the advice of a grandmother who said, "When you move your cook stove, you move your church membership." Carter joined First Baptist, the nearest Baptist congregation to the White House. Through his experiences there, "my Christian family expanded," Carter said.

"Our hearts are with you," Carter told the Clintons and the Gores. "You are part of our family."

An African-American Baptist, Gardner Taylor, pastor-emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., said Clinton's presence at the prayer session indicated "he has determined to have his tenure seasoned by prayer."

While Baptists are sometimes "a contentious, fractious, highly opinionated lot," Taylor said, "I am certain tonight that all of us who are

gathered here are of one mind, one heart and one hope...that this new time in the life of our nation will be greatly blessed."

Taylor urged the president to embody the "new covenant" language introduced in his campaign, calling for "a new covenant of caring, a new covenant of compassion, (and) a new covenant of responsibility."

Other program personalities included former White House press secretary Jody Powell; William Gray, a Baptist minister, former congressman and chairman of the United Negro College Fund; former congresswoman Barbara Jordan, who now is on the University of Texas faculty, and John Buchanan, former congressman from Alabama and co-chairman of Republicans for Clinton-Gore.

Leading in prayer during the program was Marion Hays, whose deceased husband, Brooks, was an eight-term congressman from Arkansas and president of the SBC 1958-59.

Bill Clinton's former pastor, Brian Harbour, now pastor of First Baptist Church of Richardson, Texas, led a prayer. Jack Turner, retired pastor to the Gores, read Scripture.

Christian composer and performer Ken Medema led the congregation in informal corporate worship before the Clintons and the Gores arrived.

BJC director Dunn told Associated Baptist Press the prayer service was initiated in part because "we have a profound respect for the sincere spiritual depth of Bill and Hillary Clinton," which, he said, was "grossly distorted, disregarded and slighted throughout this campaign."

He said Clinton has "a profound belief in prayer and the urgent need to have people he considers his faith family praying for him."

While the meeting was private, it was not clandestine, Dunn said. "We were very sensitive to the Clintons' desire that this not be ceremonial, that it not be quota-driven, that it not be superficial.... We wanted an opportunity -- as they did -- for folks who believe as they do to pray and sing and testify to a faith that is not locked into legalism and literalism," Dunn said.

The interfaith service, held Jan. 20 prior to the official swearing-in ceremony, drew more than 2,000 people. On the program were religious leaders from various faiths, including Baptist, other Protestant, Judaism, Roman Catholic, Islam and Greek Orthodox.

Clinton's pastor from Little Rock, Rex Horne, offered a prayer that God would give the new president peace, wisdom and courage, and Horne assured Clinton many people would be praying for him daily.

Clinton was visibly moved by the service, shedding a tear while childhood friend Carolyn Staley sang a song about the presence of God and later when singer Phil Driscoll performed "Amazing Grace." Clinton mouthed the words to most songs and recited the Beatitudes as they were read.

Gardner Taylor, pastor emeritus of Concord Baptist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., delivered the sermon, in which he said America "could not have come into existence if not attended by the purposes of God."

"Anyone who speaks against (America's) original intent -- an open democracy with liberty and justice for all -- comes close to committing treason against the idea of America," Taylor said.

Also participating in the service was Robert Stephanopoulos, a Greek Orthodox priest and father of Clinton communications director George Stephanopoulos.

ter endorses Fellowship,
ll speak at May assembly

By Jack Harwell

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Former President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalyn have issued a strong endorsement of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and Carter has agreed to speak to the Fellowship's general assembly in May.

"Rosalyn and I have been increasingly uncomfortable with policies of the dominant clique in the Southern Baptist Convention," Carter said from his office at the Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta. "However, we are still Southern Baptists who wish to support the fine mission programs of which we have been proud since childhood."

"We will just be two more loyal Baptists who will cooperate with others to make the CBF a positive, dynamic and expanding force for Christ. Although it is likely that our own Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains (Ga.) will remain in the SBC, we will share our personal gifts, time and influence with CBF. One of our common goals will be to work and pray for an ultimate healing among presently divided Baptists."

At the Fellowship's assembly, Carter will deliver the keynote address during the evening session May 13.

Pat Anderson, co-chairperson of the committee planning the assembly, said the Carters were invited to participate "because of their well-known commitment to the work of Christ, to working out their faith by seeking justice and peace, and to the Baptist heritage."

"We need to hear from them, to catch a glimpse of their vision for Fellowship ministries in places where the gospel is needed," said Anderson, a college professor from Lakeland, Fla.

In December, the former president issued a statement supporting the election of former SBC foreign missions leader Keith Parks as global missions coordinator for the Fellowship. The statement followed a meeting with Parks and other Fellowship leaders.

In January, Carter offered to give Parks a hand. "Having great faith in the dedication and sound judgment of Keith Parks, we have offered our help to him in every appropriate way," Carter said in a statement to the Atlanta-based newspaper Baptists Today. "Our frequent travels abroad, including Carter Center programs in 26 nations, will give us a special opportunity to share some of his as-yet-undefined responsibilities."

"All of us need to determine how the Fellowship can use its missions commitment to complement and enhance the work of dedicated missionaries who are already serving Christ," the former president added.

Carter responded in writing to questions submitted by Baptists Today. In the wide-ranging interview, he was asked how he views the future of the Fellowship. "The Fellowship must rise above the political battleground which has partially crippled the Southern Baptist Convention. In doing so, however, we should not be timid in expanding our ministry in a positive way.

"Also, it is necessary to make clear to Baptists like us how we can support the CBF without abandoning our churches or the Southern Baptist principles which have been such an integral part of our religious lives."

"One clear opportunity for the mission program of the Fellowship is to seek out unexplored opportunities for Christian witnessing by missionaries and lay persons in foreign lands," he continued.

"It is obvious there have been high concentrations of effort in some parts of the world, while other needy and promising fields have been deprived of equal attention. The end of the Cold War has made these opportunities and

disparities more obvious.

Because the Fellowship is new and flexible, Carter said, it can respond to missions needs in more creative ways. "This can be a new era of exciting, adventurous and gratifying Christian service!"

A lifelong Baptist lay leader and one-time member of the SBC Brotherhood Commission, Carter encouraged the involvement of laypeople in Fellowship missions work.

"In my brief experiences in pioneer home mission programs in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, in our Habitat for Humanity work in America and other countries, and in the observation of our missionaries' ministries in many foreign countries, it is obvious that Baptist laity do very little to carry out this important aspect of our faith. Many who would be glad to offer a few days or weeks of service simply do not know specifically what they can do."

Carter described the volunteer work he and Rosalyn perform for Habitat for Humanity and in Third World countries as "among the most gratifying experiences of our lives."

"What we expected to require some kind of sacrifice almost invariably turns out to be a great blessing for us personally. To see a poor family's self-respect, their hopes and dreams transformed, just because they move into a decent home they have helped to build, is always an emotional experience.

"I've seen hundreds of executives and scientists from DuPont Company in tears as they viewed a movie showing how filters made of their fiber totally eradicated Guinea worm in one year from villages which have been afflicted with this terrible disease for uncounted generations."

Asked about Baptist support for President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, Carter replied: "Not having passed the litmus tests of some influential Baptist spokespersons, these two fine young Southern Baptists were not supported by most Christians who share our faith.

"But I would expect them to put their faith into action, while avoiding the melding of church and state which has characterized the Republican Party and so-called religious fundamentalists during the last few years."

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Author says broader criteria
needed to judge TV programs

By Kathy Palen

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (ABP) -- Many TV watchdog groups miss opportunities to make a real difference in television programming because they focus on criteria that are too narrow, says the author of a new book on how Christians can change television.

When deciding whether TV programming is worthwhile or worthless, people should consider its artistic quality, its morality and its redemptiveness -- whether it contributes to society in positive ways -- suggested Quentin Schultze, author of "Redeeming Television: How TV Changes Christians -- How Christians Can Change TV."

Most of the battles now being fought over television take place in the moral arena, Schultz said. Watchdog groups that criticize the television industry, he said, usually focus solely on the morality of programming. But that is only part of what needs to be considered.

"Right now we have a lot of crummy programming that's also immoral," he explained. "If we listen to some of the watchdog groups, we would end up with

a lot of crummy programming that's not quite so immoral.

"That still doesn't improve the overall quality of the programming. By focusing back on the redemptiveness or the redeeming value, as well as the artistic quality, of programs and trying to get those criteria up front in the public mind, then viewers and the watchdog groups and also the industry may be able to agree on some of this."

Schultze, who teaches communications at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., is scheduled to speak during a conference on "Hope, Help and Healing for the American Family." The conference, sponsored by the Baptist Center for Ethics, will be held Feb. 15-16 in Nashville, Tenn.

Schultze said it is important to teach beneficial ways of using television to everyone involved -- viewers, producers, directors, distributors, critics and teachers.

"What I try to do is to come at television from all of those angles rather than doing what most people do, which is to be in one of those groups and then blame people in another group," he said. "Viewers blame the networks. Networks blame the producers. Producers and writers blame audiences for not wanting more intelligent programming. And critics blame the audiences and the industry."

Schultze also criticized some of the watchdog groups for having too narrow a view of morality. For example, he said, some groups will count the incidents of violence in a program and judge whether a program is good or bad on that basis alone. Applying the same criteria to some pages of the Bible, he added, might lead some people to want to rip out those pages.

"The point is that you just can't take individual incidents in a program out of context," Schultze explained. "Morality always has a context. It's not that you just show something, but that you're saying something about what you're showing."

"You could have two programs that both show adultery and both show the same amount of nakedness or both show people in bed for the same amount of time doing the same things. Whereas one program actually condemns adultery, the other one celebrates it.

"Every program has a point of view about the subject. Redeeming television means being able to determine what the point of view is and whether or not that's a worthwhile point of view."

People frequently apply one standard of appropriateness to all programs rather than focusing on the appropriateness of programming for the intended audience, Schultze said. Programs directed at children, he explained, should be much more restrictive in their content than programs that are on late at night for adults.

Watchdog groups, Schultze said, also tend to focus on what he calls the "big three": sex, violence and profanity. But the groups, he said, fail to look at whether programming contains such things as racism, sexism, nationalism or materialism.

Schultze warned that the television industry and television critics tend to dismiss any watchdog group that takes a "very narrow-minded, moralistic viewpoint" as a lunatic fringe group. Such a group, he said, tends to lose public credibility.

Rather than leveling blame against other groups, Christians should work to get people together to talk about television programming, Schultze said.

"I know that sounds real simple," he said, "but what's happened is that the different groups operate on the basis of stereotypes they have about the other people. For example, some television viewers believe that there's a liberal conspiracy in Hollywood to pervert the morals of the nation. There's no such thing. In fact, I would say that the biggest revelation about the

television industry is how many people in the industry really don't know what to do.

"Or sometimes people in the industry -- particularly producers and writers -- think that all of the watchdog groups are made up of irrational religious zealots, and that's simply not the case. Most of the watchdog groups have legitimate cause and real concerns. It's just difficult for them to express those concerns in a way to which the industry will listen. So getting people together to talk about these things is very, very important."

Schultze said that a group of churches or schools could organize and invite people from the television industry to come for several days of dialogue on issues related to programming.

He offered several other suggestions:

-- Provide positive support for worthwhile programming. Schultze said television producers have told him that they put much more stock in the positive mail they receive than in negative mail.

-- Allot space in church newsletters for members to recommend videotapes and television programs. "We need advice from each other because it's an impossible task for any one family to stay on top of everything that's available and to know what's worthwhile and what's not," he said.

-- Sponsor film discussion groups within churches.

-- Encourage the local school's parent-teacher organization to sponsor a television turn-off week. "This would not be for the purpose of throwing out the TV, but for the purpose of getting families together to think about how much TV they should be watching and what programs they should be watching and why," he explained. "At the same time, teachers and students should be discussing television in the schools."

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Mississippi College football program
slapped with probation by NCAA

CLINTON, Miss. (ABP) -- Mississippi College, the largest educational institution of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, has had its football program placed on probation by the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

The college was the 1989 national football champion in the NCAA's Division II.

The probation covers a four-year span, bans the school from live television coverage of its games in 1993, and reduces the number of football scholarships that would be available. It also strips the school of its national championship.

The NCAA reported that during the 1989-90 academic year there were grants in aid to 98 student athletes totalling \$258,606. The limit for Division II schools is 40.

Mississippi College admits guilt and says that it reported the violations to the NCAA. College officials, however, point out that some of those scholarships were less than full scholarships, which is legal.

The college is limited to 30 scholarships during the probation period. The coach who headed the athletic program during the period of the violations is no longer at the school.

Harry Vickery of Greenville, Miss., chairman of trustees for the college, told the Baptist Record, Mississippi Baptists' newspaper, that the president of the school, Lewis Nobles, had reported the violations a year ago

following months of investigation.

"The president and his staff have taken remedial action," Vickery said. "On behalf of the trustees and staff, we do not intend for this to happen again. We are embarrassed, we are hurt, we admit our guilt, we reported our guilt, and we press on."

Mississippi College has about 4,200 students enrolled in all of its programs.

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-- By Don McGregor

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CORRECTIONS: In the Jan. 14 ABP story "Religious leaders meet with Clinton...", please change Randall Everett to Randel Everett. And in the story "San Francisco church leaves SBC...", change Delores Street Baptist Church to Dolores Street Baptist Church. Thank you.

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