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In this Issue:

- **Conciliatory Clinton calls America to overcome prejudice, partisanship**
- **Economic and racial justice issues raised at inaugural prayer service**
- **High court to reconsider ruling limiting remedial instruction**
- **Baylor to study future of health care system**

Conciliatory Clinton calls America to overcome prejudice, partisanship

By Greg Warner

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- President William Jefferson Clinton placed his hand on his family's Bible -- open to a verse in Isaiah about reconciliation -- and took the oath of office for a second term Jan. 20. He then called on America and its political leaders to bridge the chasms of prejudice and partisanship that divide the nation.

Reconciliation is necessary if America is to renew the vision upon which it was founded, Clinton said in his inaugural address. "The promise we sought in a new land we will find in a land of new promise," he intoned.

Clinton acknowledged the political division that portends a legislative stalemate in his second term, but he said Americans expect Republicans and Democrats alike to rise above partisanship.

"The American people returned to office a president of one party and a Congress of another. Surely they did not do this to advance the politics of petty bickering and extreme partisanship they plainly deplore," he said to rousing applause, the loudest of his 22-minute speech. "No, they call us instead to be repairers of the breach, and to move on with America's mission."

Clinton's call was an allusion to Isaiah 58:12, the passage displayed during his oath: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, the repairer of the breach, the restorer of paths to dwell in."

The biblical allusion was one of the few religious references in Clinton's address. Instead, much like his first inaugural, Clinton used broad value-laden themes -- service, respect, community -- to chart a path for the nation's future. America is on the brink of a new millennium, "a moment that will define our course, and our character, for decades to come," he said.

Clinton's oath and speech, recited on a clear but cold morning, were witnessed by a crowd of more than 200,000 which stretched down the West Front of the Capitol and spilled onto the Washington Mall.

Among those participating were the choir and orchestra of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., Clinton's home church. After the inaugural address, the Immanuel group, directed by Lynn Madden, removed the coats that covered their choir robes and sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic" from a chilly perch high atop the inaugural platform.

Also performing for the inaugural was a choir composed of singers from churches burned in last year's spate of church arsons.

Leading the inaugural invocation for the eighth time was Southern Baptist evangelist Billy Graham. "Help us to be reconciled first to you and second to each other," he prayed.

Gardner Taylor, a renowned African-American pastor from New York City, led the benediction. Taylor, a Progressive National Baptist, also lamented the toll race has taken on America, which he said has been "imperiled often by the very richness of its diversity."

Clinton's inauguration coincided with the federal holiday celebrating the birth of Martin Luther King. Clinton recalled the legacy of the slain civil-rights leader, whose message of racial reconciliation he said "moved the conscience of a nation."

"The divide of race has been America's constant curse," Clinton said. "And each new wave of immigrants gives new targets to old prejudices. Prejudice and contempt, cloaked in the pretense of religious or political conviction, are no different."

Americans must root out prejudice, as well as partisanship, to make the country "a land of new promise," Clinton said.

"Will we come together or come apart?" he asked.

Clinton painted a rosy vision of America's future, one devoid of racism, drugs and violence and replete with educational opportunity and mutual respect. Creating that future, he said, will require three things: a limited government that empowers "better lives," a commitment to personal responsibility, and "a new spirit of community."

Unlike most of his Democratic predecessors, however, Clinton said the power of government to create such a world is limited. Americans have "resolved" the longtime debate about the government's role, he said. "Government is not the problem, and government is not the solution. We -- the American people -- we are the solution," he said to applause.

"The pre-eminent mission of our new government is to give all Americans an opportunity -- not a guarantee, but an opportunity -- to build better lives."

Such centrist talk caught the attention of Republicans. Lamar Alexander, a former Republican presidential candidate, called Clinton's tone "refreshing" and urged Republicans to support the president's focus on education and smaller government. "When he sings from our hymn book we shouldn't be afraid to sing with him," Alexander said in a prepared statement.

Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, said Clinton's speech, though lacking in specifics, signals "Clinton's further moving to the center and right on a range of issues, including smaller government, balanced budgets and the need for moral renewal in America."

Allan and Valerie Burton, Baptist seminary students from Richmond, Va., said they welcomed the president's bipartisan tone. "There are valid Christian principles in both party platforms, and we must not align Christianity with just one party," said Valerie.

Like most who traveled to Washington for the inauguration, the Burtons are Democrats. "There are Baptists who really do support him and believe he is committed to the principles that Baptists hold dear," Allan said. He added he respects Clinton's focus on individuals and his Christian stance, which he said enables the president to do a better job.

James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee, said Clinton "rose above the pettiness and vicious slandering that usually goes on in this city." He said the tone of the speech was "perfectly consonant" with the messages of redemption and reconciliation Clinton heard at the inaugural prayer service early Monday morning.

That service, like a similar one prior to the 1993 inauguration, was held at the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church and featured an eclectic array of religious singers and speakers, mostly Christian but also Jewish and Moslem.

Jesse Jackson and Tony Campolo, both Baptist preachers, told the prayer meeting that America labors under a burden of racism and poverty. They commended Clinton for fighting both.

A day earlier, Clinton and his wife, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, attended the early Sunday morning worship service at Columbia Baptist Church in suburban Falls Church, Va., where the president's Little Rock pastor, Rex Horne, was the guest preacher.

Columbia pastor Randel Everett introduced the Clintons, who sat on the front row with Horne's family, and suggested the visiting president "must be extremely disappointed to find out we have a guest preacher today."

Horne and Everett are cousins and, like Clinton, Arkansas natives.

In a sermon about responsible citizenship, Horne said Christians are commanded to bathe their government and its leaders in prayer, which he suggested has the power to influence the course of a nation.

Horne, whose church has been the target of anti-Clinton protesters and an attempted expulsion from the Southern Baptist Convention, said many Christians are shirking their duty to pray for the government. Whatever the legacy of the Clinton administration, he noted, "It will say more about the prayer life of Southern Baptists than it will the president."

Later Sunday morning, the Clintons worshipped at Foundry United Methodist Church, where Hillary is a member and the couple frequently attends.

Clinton, 50, is the fourth Baptist to hold the office of president, all in this century.

Warren Harding, Harry Truman and Jimmy Carter are the others. All but Harding were Southern Baptists and Democrats. Clinton is the first Democrat since Franklin Roosevelt to be re-elected to the office.

Another Southern Baptist and Democrat, Albert Gore Jr., took the vice presidential oath for the second time immediately prior to Clinton's swearing in. Gore, from Carthage, Tenn., is a member of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Va.

Clinton and Gore are the first all-Baptist executive duo in the White House.

The inaugural ceremony was followed by the traditional two-hour parade down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, led by the Clintons and Gores. Parade participants were a potpourri of America, with marching units from every state and Guam.

A half block of the parade route was lined with six-foot pictures of aborted fetuses, part of a protest aimed at Clinton's support for abortion choice. Prior to the parade, the protesters successfully fought attempts by parade organizers to ban them from the parade route. A judge ruled the parade was a public event that could not be shielded from protesters.

Across the street from the abortion protest, a lesbian and gay band entertained those waiting for the parade to start.

-30-

Economic and racial justice issues raised at Inaugural prayer service

By Kenny Byrd

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- Speakers at a prayer service preceding the Jan. 20 inauguration of President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore discussed problems of race and poverty and called for an end to partisan bickering among politicians.

The two-hour service at Washington's Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, the traditional kick-off of inauguration day activities, was punctuated by sacred music, prayers, Bible readings and keynote addresses by Baptist preachers Jesse Jackson and Tony Campolo.

Caught up in the celebrative mood, audience members yelled, "Preach on!," clapped their hands to music and rose to their feet during the singing of "Amazing Grace." Clinton and Gore appeared emotionally charged and joined in the expressive actions.

Campolo, a sociologist and professor at Eastern College, an American Baptist school in St. David's, Pa., said the nation should care for its poor.

"To this great president and this great vice president, I say embrace the Lord. ... For the Lord blesses the nation that remembers the poor," said Campolo, an evangelist known for his ministries among the poor in America's cities and Haiti.

The Lord's Prayer, he noted, asks for "daily bread."

"No child should go to bed without bread. No homeless person should despair for lack of bread. And we must not forget the people in the Third World on this day when we celebrate America," he said.

Campolo, an organizer of the "Call to Renewal" movement formed last year to counter polarizing voices of the religious right and left, said Americans are tired of "the politics of bile" characterized by name-calling and partisan bickering.

"Enough of this accusing, and let us go on together, forgiving each other as God has forgiven us," Campolo pleaded.

Campolo said the country must be willing to resist "dark forces."

Evil "expresses itself in racism, in sexism, in homophobia, in pornography -- and worst of all -- in that kind of religion that is arrogantly triumphalistic and dares to say, 'If you don't agree with us, we will persecute you.' There must be an end to this," Campolo stormed.

Shifting gears, Campolo switched to his trademark animated style to stir the congregation to laughter and shouts of encouragement.

Campolo, who is white, said he is a member at an African-American Baptist church where the congregation will say, "preach on" as a show of support. Minutes later, Gore waved his hand and told Campolo, "Preach on."

Campolo continued to stir the crowd, even receiving a "high-five" from Jackson in the middle of his sermon.

Jackson, president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, joked earlier about the upbeat musical selections and emotional crowd response. "It is clear that when we all come together, we're finally Pentecostal."

Coincidentally, the inauguration took place on the federal holiday observing the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. Jackson, a King protege, used the occasion to reflect on the slain civil-rights leader's challenges to the country.

King was a "drum major for justice," Jackson said, who "disturbed the comfortable and comforted the disturbed."

King's challenge, Jackson noted, was to "imagine beyond the status quo, dream bigger than your circumstances and watch over the minority with a majority dream."

King held no office, commanded no army, had no personal wealth, "yet he did more to change this country than any civil leader in this century," Jackson said.

King's dream was that "America was one big tent," Jackson said. "And on that one big tent, equal protection under the law, equal opportunity, equal access."

Jackson said the country must take care of people "who are left in the margins." The Bible, he said, measures character not by who people are but by "how we treat the least of these."

Jackson called on the country to "de-racialize" the welfare debate.

"Most poor people aren't on welfare; they work everyday," he said. "And they're not black, not brown; they're white, they're female and two-thirds are children. Let's get to the morality of this matter. We must de-racialize the welfare debate and equal opportunity. These are national imperatives. These are not subject to race baiting. This is the challenge of Martin Luther King, Jr."

Jackson also encouraged First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to not "let lesser men, frightened people, take you from the dream of fighting for health care for all American citizens." "It's the right thing," Jackson said. "When you would dare to be a giant, don't let ... these little moral midgets pull you down. Stand tall."

History's only perfect person, Jackson said, "was killed at the age of 33 by a combination of preachers and government officials."

The event lasted over two hours. Among other participants were BeBe and CeCe Winans from Nashville, Tenn., singer Wintley Phipps, trumpeter Phil Driscoll, soprano Carolyn Staley, president of the National Association of Evangelicals Don Argue and soloist Jennifer Holliday.

-30-

High court to reconsider ruling limiting remedial instruction

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- The U.S. Supreme Court announced Jan. 17 it will reconsider its 1985 ruling that barred government-paid teachers from providing remedial education at parochial schools.

Since the 1985 ruling in *Aguilar v. Felton*, federally funded remedial instruction for parochial-school students has taken place mostly off religious-school grounds. The remedial education program, first established by Congress in 1965, provides special instruction in subjects such as math and reading for economically and educationally disadvantaged students.

In an appeal accepted by the Supreme Court, public-school officials in New York City and parents of parochial-school students argue that subsequent court rulings have eroded the "doctrinal underpinnings" of the 1985 ruling to the point that "*Aguilar* may no longer command the support of a majority of the (Supreme) Court."

In a decision affirmed by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, federal-district Judge John Gleeson acknowledged questions about the ruling's "life expectancy" but denied a motion to lift the ban against using taxpayer funds to pay remedial teachers at parochial schools.

"There may be good reason to conclude that *Aguilar's* demise is imminent, but it has not yet occurred," Gleeson said. School officials should be permitted, however, to seek the reconsideration of *Aguilar* that "a majority of the Supreme Court appears willing, if not anxious, to undertake," he concluded.

Alternative means to provide remedial instruction at parochial schools "have proven to be both less effective and more expensive than the on-site program which existed for 20 years prior to *Aguilar*," New York officials contend.

Those alternatives include transporting students to public schools or leased sites; mobile instruction vans and the use of computer assisted instruction. School officials said the overall cost of complying with *Aguilar* from 1986 to 1994 exceeded \$93 million.

A brief by attorney's for Betty-Louise Felton and others who originally challenged New York's policy opposed the effort to ask the Supreme Court to reconsider its ruling. New York officials, the brief charges, overstated the expenses and administrative burden in complying with *Aguilar's* mandate.

Allowing classes to be taught on parochial-school campuses would create excessive entanglement between church and state and result in impermissible state aid to religious schools, the lawyers contend.

Secretary of Education Richard Riley has supported the school officials. Acting Solicitor General Walter Dellinger has also filed a brief at the Supreme Court supporting the move to reconsider *Aguilar*.

In a statement prepared in December 1995, Riley said compliance with the 1985 ruling has cost school districts "hundreds of millions of dollars in non-instructional costs."

Riley said remedial instruction can be provided at private schools "without aiding religion or creating excessive entanglement between government and religion."

The 1985 ruling "does not advance the progress of education or pass the test of good common sense," he said.

-30-

Baylor to study future of health care system

By Toby Druin

WACO, Texas (ABP) -- Regents of Baylor University voted Jan. 17 to study several options concerning the future of Baylor Health Care System in Dallas, including possible sale or consolidation.

However, Boone Powell Jr., president of the health-care system, said his board of trustees, which must approve any new arrangement, is not considering selling. The system's Baylor University Medical Center has been a fixture in Dallas for almost 90 years.

"This board has no interest in changing our community-based organization," Powell told the Baptist Standard in a telephone interview.

The newspaper reported that at least one firm authorized representatives to make an offer to purchase the health-care system but was told the system's trustees had no interest in hearing it.

It has been rumored for weeks that the health-care system, which includes several facilities in the Dallas area, would be sold with the proceeds going to the university's endowment fund. The system is said to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

Stan Madden, vice president for marketing at Baylor University in Waco, said the school's regents ordered a "due diligence" study of options following a joint meeting of the regents and the health-care system trustees.

The meeting was to hear a report from a Nashville, Tenn., consulting firm, Nemzoff and Company, which specializes in the health-care industry.

The consultant was hired several months ago, after the health-care system approached the regents about the possibility of consolidating with other area non-profit health care providers.

Because the health-care system's trustees are appointed by the university's regents, lawyers advised the regents to consider all the options, including no change, consolidation, sale to a for-profit company, a joint venture with a for-profit company, buying other non-profit institutions or selling the system.

After hearing the consultant's report, Madden said, the regents ordered the "due diligence" study of ramifications of selling the system or consolidating it with other non-profit systems. The study is expected to take several weeks, he said.

Powell said the health-care system proposed consolidation with other area non-profit institutions because of strong competition from Columbia Health Care Corp., which has become "very attractive in negotiating contracts" in the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area.

Baylor Health Care System has several units around Dallas but none in Fort Worth and some other parts of Texas. Consolidation could accommodate those areas.

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