



CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

June-July 1980

EIGHT TO EIGHTY

Some Christian Life Commission Highlights
from 1908 to 1980

Many think that Southern Baptist involvement with social issues is a recent development. This is hardly the case. According to Southern Baptist historian Walter B. Shurden:

While the Southern Baptist Convention was certainly organized for missionary activity, often overlooked or underplayed is the fact that it was organized *because* of a social issue, that of slavery. In fact, the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention was nothing less than social action. Many factors, other than slavery, have often been viewed as causes of the 1845 convention, but the fact of the matter is that, apart from slavery, the Southern Baptist Convention would not have been organized. The significant point in all of this is that Southern Baptists were speaking out on a social issue in the very formation of their organizational life.

However, it was more than half a century later, in

1908, before Christian social concern and Christian social action began regularly to receive official Convention attention.

1901-1909—Social Concern Begins to Take Form

The 1907 Southern Baptist Convention appointed a special Committee on Civic Righteousness to work during the following year.

Serving as chairman of this committee was A. J. Barton. Barton had pastoral experience in Tennessee, Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, and North Carolina. In addition, he had held positions with both the Home and Foreign Mission Boards and had served with three state convention offices. Appointed with Barton were: S. P. Brooks, president of Baylor, later president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and a vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention; J. B. Gambrell, former president of Mercer University and later editor of the *Baptist Standard*, Southwestern Seminary faculty member, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention; P. E. Burroughs, pastor of First Baptist Church, Temple, Texas and later of Broadway Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Texas and still later educational secretary of the Sunday School Board; and W. T. Lowrey, president of Blue Mountain College and later Mississippi College.

In 1908 the Committee on Civic Righteousness made its first report to the Convention. The report was a clarion call to broad social action. The Convention adopted the challenging report which said, in part, "We are learning anew that Christ's commission to his followers is . . . to make down here a righteous society in which Christ's will shall be done. . . ." The committee called on the Convention "to resist the encroachments of evil in society and politics and to help build a new order based on righteousness."

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Why Christian Ethics?

By
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Why should Christian ethics be a priority for Southern Baptists?

In a time when we are talking about "getting back to the basics," "eliminating the nonessentials," and "emphasizing the fundamentals" we must stress Christian ethics because it is a basic, essential, and fundamental part of the Christian faith.

Why Indeed

Because we follow Jesus as Lord, we must be concerned about Christian ethics. Over and over by his example and teaching Jesus led his followers to live by love, to minister to human hurt, to do God's will in relation to social institutions and to individuals.

Because we claim to be a Bible believing, Bible obeying, and Bible proclaiming people, we must emphasize Christian ethics. It is part of the Bible from beginning to end. The Bible tells us both how people are to be saved and how saved people are to live; Southern Baptists, therefore, ought to deal with evangelism and ethics, with belief and behavior, with doctrine and doing.

Because God is concerned with Christian ethics, Southern Baptists must be. We may not want to—ethics can be controversial and costly—but really we have no option if we follow God's will. Ours is not to resist divine orders but to carry them out, and the Bible is very clear about the priority God places on His oughtness for daily life. God's imperative mood regarding ethics stems from His nature and ours. God is loving, just, righteous and we, made in His image, are to love, to act justly, and to seek righteousness. Having created us, He knows how we function best. Christian ethics is not peripheral but central. A strong emphasis on Christian ethics is needed in our families, churches, seminaries, and denomination. Here are some reasons why.

In Our Homes

Biblical ethics sets forth clear teachings about family life. To follow them is to build strong, stable, loving families. To fail to heed them is to invite disaster. In our homes, we need daily doses of Christian ethics to counter the crippling effects of sin and to build healthy relationships of love.

Christian ethics calls not only for applying the message of the Bible in our families but also for ministering to members of other families who need help—divorcees, widows, parents of delinquent youth, single parents, the aging, the poor, the unemployed, for instance. Many families are damaged and destroyed by social conditions over which they may have little or no control. We need an emphasis on Christian ethics to

remind us that we have a responsibility to work to correct such conditions.

In Our Churches

From their beginning in New Testament times churches have had an ethical dimension. The marching orders from Jesus to the earliest churches included an ethical emphasis. Jesus said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20) Much of what Jesus commanded concerned ethics—human relations and social responsibility. The church cannot be true to the orders from her master without an emphasis on Christian ethics.

In Our Seminaries

Because Christian ethics ought to be part of the life of our churches, it follows that Christian ethics ought to be part of the curriculum of our seminaries since they are charged with the responsibility of educating and training persons to minister in Christ's name.

The curriculum of our six seminaries is based on the Bible, and because of the Bible's ethical content, the curriculum should include ethics. It is true that Christian ethics could be taught as part of such courses as New Testament, Old Testament, and theology—and often is—but the need also exists for special courses in Christian ethics.

As an Agency of the Southern Baptist Convention

An agency specializing in ethics can be a gadfly, a conscience pricker. As specialists, its personnel can be better informed on ethical issues than others who deal with a wide range of issues. Without the tensions created by the Christian Life Commission to face up to controversial issues, we might as a denomination avoid them altogether.

Conclusion

Why Christian ethics? Because God is who He is, and the Bible teaches what it teaches, and the mission of our churches remains what it has always been. For a family, church, seminary, or denomination to be without a strong emphasis on Christian ethics is no minor omission but a complete distortion of what life in Christ is to be. So let's stick to the fundamentals, stress the basics, emphasize the essentials, and get on with bold mission—and that includes doing Christian ethics.

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Eight to Eighty

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1910-1919—Social Concern Takes Root and Begins to Grow

The Committee on Civic Righteousness' report was made a regular part of the Convention's order of business. In 1913, a report called the Convention to maintain a standing Social Service Committee to deal with alcohol and "with other wrongs which curse society today," including such "serious wrongs as the white slave traffic and child labor." W. L. Poteat, president of Wake Forest College, was chosen as chairman.

Poteat presented the first report of the Social Service and Temperance Committee at the 1914 Convention. The Convention adopted the report which touched on the religious basis for social service, the family; the state, religious freedom, education, business, prison, war, alcohol, narcotics, and vice.

In 1918 authorization was given by the Convention for the Committee "to employ a salaried worker, to create and publish a tract and leaflet literature on social service, and to do other things as in its judgment may be necessary . . . (to) promote social service work. . . ." That authorization, however, was not implemented.

1920-1929—A Broadened Mandate Develops

1920 was an important year for the Committee. Prohibition went into effect on January 16. This allowed the Committee, which had majored on alcohol education and action for many years, to turn more of its attention to other social issues. The Committee's 1920 report reflected this increasingly comprehensive approach. Apparently in support of this change, the Convention adopted a resolution offered by L. R. Scarborough which changed the name of the Committee to the Commission on Social Service.

1920 was also the year for one of the strongest social statements any Southern Baptist had made up to that point. George W. Truett, who had been elected to serve on the Committee on Temperance and Social Service in 1918, delivered his famous sermon which dealt with Baptists and social involvement from the east steps of the national Capitol on May 16. Speaking to some fifteen thousand messengers during the Southern Baptist Convention meeting, he preached mightily in support of applied Christianity. He paid special attention to religious liberty and its great corollary, separation of church and state. He called for "humane and righteous" laws for the "maintenance of righteousness everywhere." He declared that "humanity is bound up together in the big bundle of life" and that "national isolation is no longer possible in the earth." He verbalized the Baptist position that there are things worth dying for, such as the "the sanctity of womanhood,"

"the safety of children," and "the integrity of one's country."

This sermon calling for social involvement on a solid base of "holy living and godliness" carried more weight than any Convention resolution could have carried because of the authority of the speaker, the timeliness and setting of the statement, and the importance of the subjects to Baptists. The message elicited strong affirmation then from the Baptist public, and it has had a continuing place of unusual significance in the life of Southern Baptists since its delivery sixty years ago. The sermon may be perceived as a broad and powerful social pronouncement which grew out of Baptist polity, reflected Baptist polity, and conformed to Baptist polity.

Through annual reports during this decade, the Social Service Commission called Southern Baptists to deal with a broad spectrum of social concerns. The 1926 report, for instance, declared that "whatever affects social order and civic conditions is a matter of interest and concern to us as citizens and as servants of our Lord."

1930-1939—Social Consciousness Is Heightened Amidst Social Turmoil

In the face of Nazi war clouds, the Depression, repeal of prohibition, labor disputes, and seething racial turmoil, Southern Baptists became more aware than ever of the need to deal with social issues. The Social Service Commission's annual reports and recommendations grew longer and more involved as the Convention was called upon to respond to the great social challenges of that day. By 1936, nearly every state Baptist convention had established a standing social service committee after the pattern of the Commission to speak to a wide variety of moral and social concerns.

Though a recommendation to provide the Social Service Commission with financial support failed in 1936, the Convention nevertheless was moving steadily toward an understanding that the gospel contains an inescapable moral and social imperative.

1940-1949—An Institutional Structure Is Fashioned

The Social Service Commission entered the 1940s with a report and recommendations to the Southern Baptist Convention dealing forthrightly with alcohol, race relations, and war and peace.

In 1942, chairman A. J. Barton was ill and unable to present the report of the Commission. He was lauded for his work, having served as chairman since 1914—twenty eight years. The Commission reported in 1943 that A. J. Barton had died. In that same year the Social Service Commission elected J. B. Weatherspoon as chairman.

The Commission was unbudgeted and unstaffed; but it was standing; and J. B. Weatherspoon led it to stand in new and constructive ways. Having served as pastor of three Baptist churches and as professor in three Southern Baptist theological seminaries,

Weatherspoon was widely known and respected. He called for deeper Christian social concern and for broader Christian social action. Pointing out the futility of a mere report, quickly given and as quickly forgotten, he lamented the lack of social emphasis between Convention sessions and the lack of financial support without which it was not possible to develop an organization to implement moral concern. Weatherspoon declared that time, circumstance, and the moral authority of Jesus Christ combined to lay upon Southern Baptists the need to re-appraise the purpose and function of the Social Service Commission and to create a stronger agency for social concern and social action.

On recommendation of the Executive Committee, the 1947 Convention responded favorably to Weatherspoon's appeal. The Social Service Commission was given an initial budget of \$10,000 from the Cooperative Program with which it promptly prepared to employ a professional staff.

The Commission's first executive secretary was Hugh A. Brimm, a doctoral graduate in social ethics from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He began work in 1948 after having been head of the department of sociology and social ethics at Mercer University. Making his headquarters in Louisville, Brimm vigorously addressed himself through writing (he established LIGHT), Ridgecrest conferences, and speaking widely to issues of war and peace, race relations, justice, poverty, alcohol, drugs, labor, and aging.

1950-1959—Strength Is Achieved Through Struggles

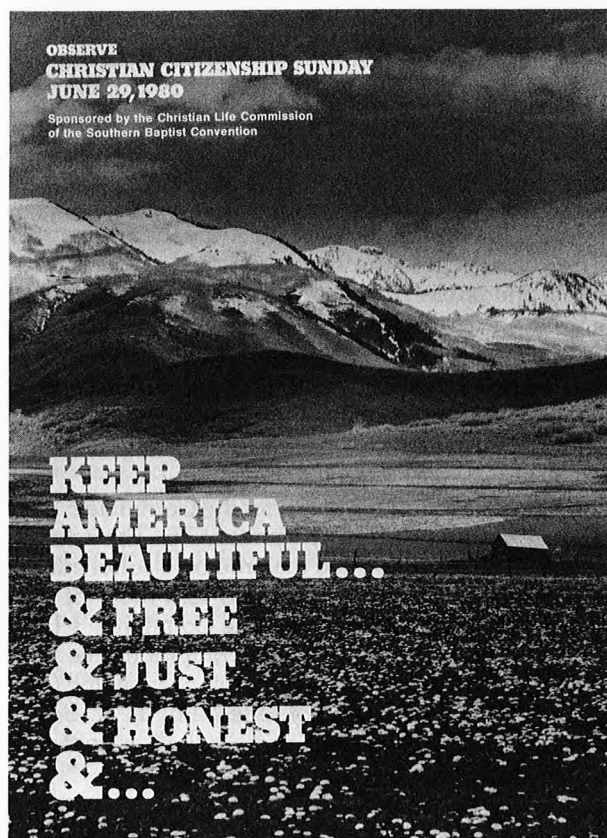
A. C. Miller was elected to serve as the Commission's new executive secretary in 1952 when Hugh Brimm resigned to accept a teaching position at the Carver School of Missions and Social Work. Miller came to the work from his position as director of the Christian Life Commission of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. Before that he had been a pastor. With his coming, two especially significant decisions were made. The Commission moved its headquarters to Nashville affording itself a better opportunity of integrating its applied Christianity emphasis into the life and work of other denominational agencies. Also, the name of the agency was changed to the Christian Life Commission.

From the beginning, Miller insisted that the work of the Commission was biblical, not merely social.

When the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 that the "separate but equal" doctrine in education was unconstitutional, the Commission brought a recommendation to the Convention supporting the Court's position. The Commission insisted that the racial problem must be confronted with the biblical teaching "that every man is embraced in the love of God; every man has value in the sight of God; and every man is included in the plan of God." This particularly prophetic note was sounded in the midst of a highly explosive atmosphere. Though objection was raised, the Commission's recommenda-

tion was overwhelmingly adopted by the Convention by a vote of about 6000 to 50.

Through the 1950s, Miller and the Commission continued to speak on race relations, peace, family, life, labor relations, alcohol, and related social concerns. Support for the cause of applied Christianity expanded with the growing number of doctoral students in Christian social ethics graduating and serving in the denomination after studying at Southern Seminary under Henlee H. Barnett, at Southwestern Seminary under T. B. Maston, and at Southeastern Seminary under O. T. Binkley.



1960-1969—Unprecedented Growth Is Realized

Foy Valentine came to the Christian Life Commission in 1960 as executive secretary upon A. C. Miller's retirement. Valentine had previously succeeded Miller at the Texas Christian Life Commission.

In 1961 the Convention adopted a program statement for the Christian Life Commission which said, in part:

The Christian Life Commission shall assist Southern Baptists in the propagation of the gos-

pel by (1) helping Southern Baptists to become more aware of the ethical implications of the gospel with regard to such aspects of daily living as family life, human relations, moral issues, economic life and daily work, citizenship, and related fields; and by (2) helping them create with God's leadership and by his grace the kind of moral and social climate in which the Southern Baptist witness for Christ will be most effective.

Fiery controversy often surrounded the Christian Life Commission's annual reports and recommendations in the 1960s. The Commission's statements on such issues as race, capital punishment, and extremism were sometimes repudiated; its annual seminars were sometimes denounced; and its very existence was sometimes threatened.

Still, the Christian Life Commission's staff, budget, breadth of concern, friends, supporters, and influence in communicating the gospel grew. Why? Because the Convention sensed that the social turbulence of the 1960s absolutely required some response. Like a great ship being turned with a paddle, the Convention slowly and gradually turned more of its attention to social issues, without turning away from its concern for missions.

1970-1979—The Commission Becomes Solidly Established

In the decade of the Seventies, Southern Baptists moved definitely toward a more positive acceptance of the Christian Life Commission than before. The Com-

mission was edging toward maturity. Its emphases and activities were in keeping with the grave moral issues of the times. The recommendations in Kansas City in 1977 relating to television morality were overwhelmingly accepted. Response to the Commission's special project on "Help for Television Viewers" required production of literally millions of pieces of materials for use by Southern Baptist churches. The Commission's Declaration on Human Rights was adopted by the 1978 Convention as its own human rights declaration. Southern Baptists' ethical interests began to take on dimensions that were both deeper and wider than before.

1980—Facing the Future

The new decade into which we have just entered has brought a new vigor and a sense of new beginning.

The ethical consciousness of most Southern Baptists is at a high point. The moral imperative of Christianity has been widely accepted and is being widely practiced and preached. Pastors, denominational employees, and lay people in every local church give evidence of being ready to respond to the moral and ethical challenges of the day.

The Southern Baptist Convention's response to social issues through the Christian Life Commission and its organizational predecessors has been gradual.

The response, however, has been essentially positive, and it is steadily growing. By the grace of God and with the continued support of Southern Baptists, the Christian Life Commission can expect to stay involved at its task of "helping changed people to change the world."

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS

By T. B. Maston
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When we say that the cross is the unifying symbol of the Christian life we do not mean to imply that it is merely a symbol. It is a symbol but it is much more. It is also an historic event. That was a very real cross on which Christ died. The reality of that cross gives depth and meaning to the cross as a symbol of the kind of life we should live for Christ in the world.

The Christian and His Cross

The cross, when properly understood, is not exclusively for Christ nor exclusively a thing of the past tense. Jesus is not supposed to "bear the cross alone and all the world go free. No, there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for [you and] me." What Jesus had attempted to teach his disciples came vividly alive with a new and deeper meaning for them after his crucifixion and resurrection.

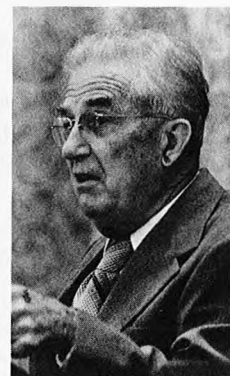
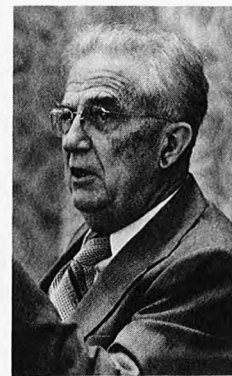
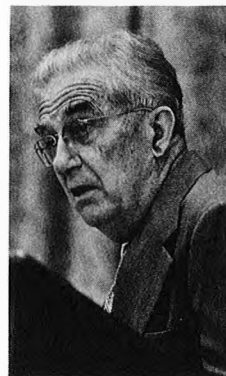
What do we mean when we say that the Christian must take up his cross to follow Christ? It does not mean the wearing of a cross around the neck or in the lapel of a coat. Neither does it refer to suffering or some burden that comes through the operation of the laws of nature. How often we hear people say when some great sorrow or some great personal suffering comes upon them, "I guess this is my cross; I will have to bear it." This is not the basic meaning of the cross for the Christian, although the victorious acceptance of and adjustment to such suffering may be used by the Lord to bless the lives of many people.

A cross is something on which one is crucified. Crucifixion means suffering, but all suffering cannot be identified with the taking up of a cross, with Christian crucifixion. Suffering which can be identified with the cross must be, among other things, suffering that is accepted for the sake of Christ and his cause. Its purpose and ultimate end must be redemptive, although in the deepest sense only the suffering of Christ on the cross is redemptive.

What does it mean in a more specific way for one to take up a cross? It involves for the Christian the crucifixion of self with selfish ambitions and purposes. It may mean walking an unknown path, but how grateful we should be that we walk with a known Companion who has walked that path before us! As we walk with the Christ of the cross, we have a deepening insight into the meaning and nature of the cross and find ourselves increasingly living in the spirit of the cross.

Paul, who had an important place for "the cross of Christ" in his epistles gives considerable insight into the meaning of the cross or crucifixion for the Christian. He says that "those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh ["lower nature," NEB] with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5:24). He also says that the world had been

crucified to him and he to the world (Gal. 6:14). Still again he says that "our old self ["the man we once were," NEB] was crucified with him" (Rom. 6:6; for additional references see 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; Phil. 3:8, 10; Col. 1:24). The nearest thing to a definition in the Bible of crucifixion or cross-bearing for a Christian is the following statement by Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Paul could go so far as to say "for me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). We cannot say that, but it should be the desire of our hearts that we move in that direction.



While Jesus did not set forth specifically the meaning of the Christian's cross, except that it involved self-denial, he did spell out in general terms its nature. By comparing the accounts in Matthew (16), Mark (8), and Luke (9) of the conversation at Caesarea Philippi we discover the following concerning the Christian and his cross: (1) Taking up the cross is voluntary; "if any man would come after me." The cross is not laid on the shoulder of the disciple; it is taken up. (2) It is necessary: "If any man would come after me." We do not have to take up the cross; he will not force it on us, but we must take up our cross if we are to follow him. This emphasis is not only found at Caesarea Philippi but also in other conversations he had with his disciples (see Matt. 10:38; Luke 14:27). There is no real discipleship without the cross, or, as Bonhoeffer says, "Just as Christ is Christ only in virtue of His suffering and rejection, so the disciple is a disciple only in so far as he shares His Lord's suffering and rejection and crucifixion. . . . In other words it means the cross." (3) Taking up a cross is personal: "if any man." (4) It is also universal. Here the three synoptic gospels combined give us a very graphic picture. Mark 8:34 says that "he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them. . . ." Luke 9:23 says, "and he said to all." Taking up the cross does not apply exclusively to the missionary, to the pastor, or to others in church-related vocations. It applies to all of God's children. (5) One other great truth

UNIFYING SYMBOL: THE CROSS

concerning the taking up of the cross is revealed by an examination of Luke's account of Caesarea Philippi. According to Luke, Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). It is a daily or continuing experience.

Results of Taking up the Cross

What are the results of a Christian taking up his cross? We will discover the answer to this question by reviewing briefly the relation of the cross and the purposes of God in the life of Christ. As suggested earlier, Christ came to reveal God to man, to reveal his love for man and also his hatred of sin. Man could never have known fully either of these had Christ not died on the cross. It is John who says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16). The cross also elicits or produces a love that must be shared with others. One reason for this is the fact that the love expressed in the cross is not exclusively for us but for all men. Men around us will come to know that kind of love to the degree that we, in response to his love for us, take up our cross and follow him.

Also, as we take up a cross and follow him we will find life for ourselves. Immediately after his invitation at Caesarea Philippi for the disciples to deny self and take up the cross and follow him, he said, "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25; cf. 10:39, John 12:25). Similarly, Paul says, "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (Rom. 6:8). The cross is not only a symbol of death but also of life.

Another way of stating this same great truth is to say that resurrection follows crucifixion. Oscar Cullman says we should write it crucifixion-resurrection. Jesus told the disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things and be killed and "on the third day be raised" (Matt. 16:21). His resurrection was mentioned in the same breath as his crucifixion. So it is with the child of God. Bonhoeffer's frequently quoted statement is that "Jesus Christ and His call are necessarily our death and our life." Death comes first, then life, but there is no real crucifixion without resurrection. Here is one of the marvelous paradoxes of the Gospel: life comes through death, but it has to be a real death or crucifixion, without any motivation beyond the crucifixion itself. There is no place here for self-seeking self-denial, for crucifixion with the expectation of resurrection.

There is one other glorious result of the Christian's cross-bearing. He will not only find life in its fullness, he also will be a source of life to others. Jesus came to

redeem man as well as to reveal God. We cannot redeem men but we can be a redeeming influence among men. This we will be as we deny self, take up our cross, and follow him. In John 12 immediately preceding the statement by Jesus that "he who loves his life loses it," he said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone [“a single grain,” Ph.]; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (“a rich harvest,” NEB) (v. 24). Later in the same conversation he said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (v. 32). In verse 24 is found the basic law of God's universe: new life comes through death. In verse 25 it is applied to human relations, while in verse 32 it is applied to the spiritual order. We give life to others as we give our own lives in unselfish devotion to them and to our heavenly Father.

Since none of us is perfect we are forced to say that to the degree that we deny self, to the degree that we take up our cross, to that degree and that degree only we will reveal God and his power, will discover life abundant, and will be a source of life and blessing to others.

The Cross and Other Aspects of the Christian Life

The Christian life is so broad and varied that no one term can adequately describe its ethic. It is clear, however, that the cross is the one symbol or general principle that most nearly unifies, ties into one bundle, and illuminates the various aspects or approaches to the Christian life and its ethic.

For example, if the dominant motive of the Christian's life is the glory of God, it will mean the denial of self, expressed in the taking up of a cross. Similarly, one will move toward perfection or full maturity as he walks in fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ. We will walk with him only as and to the degree that we deny self and take up our cross and follow him. Other terms are used to describe the Christian ethic such as an ethic of the Holy Spirit, a *koinonia* ethic, a covenant ethic, and a commitment ethic. Each of these would require the denial of self and the taking up of a cross.

Let us spell out a little more fully the relation of the cross to the will of God as the source of authority to the kingdom of God as the supreme value, and to love as the crowning virtue of the Christian life.

There was evidently a close relation between the will of God and the cross in the life of Christ. You remember the incident at Jacob's well (John 4:1-42). Jesus was weary and stayed at the well while his disciples went into town for food. He had had the conversation with the Samaritan woman during which he had introduced her to the living water. When the disciples returned and offered him food, he declined and said to them, "I have

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food to eat of which you do not know" (v. 32). They thought possibly someone had brought him food. His word to them was, "My food is to do ["obey," TEV] the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (v. 34). On another occasion he said, "I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30; cf. John 6:38). Here is the language of self-giving, of self-denial or cross-bearing. The cross for Jesus represented the last step of submission to the Father's will.

What is true in the life of the Master should be true in the life of his follower: we should not seek our own will but the will of him who has sent us. What Jesus said after his resurrection to the small group of disciples he would say to all of us, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). He was sent; we are sent. He was sent to do the Father's will; we are sent to do his will. He was sent to reveal God; we are sent to reveal him. He was God incarnate; we are to be Christ incarnate. He was sent to redeem man; we are sent to be a redeeming influence among men. To accomplish all that he was sent to do meant the cross. To accomplish all that he has sent us to do, likewise means the cross for us.

Another of the central concepts in the life and teachings of Jesus was the kingdom of God. Some consider it the key idea or watchword of his earthly ministry and of his movement in general. The disciple of Christ is to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). The reign, the rule, or the kingdom of God is to be sought before wealth and material things, even before the necessities of life. Jesus promised that the latter would be added if his followers put the kingdom first.

The close relation of love (*agape*) and the cross is equally clear. As suggested previously, *agape* is self-giving, it speaks the language of the cross. The cross is the supreme demonstration, manifestation, or proof of the love of God. It is at the cross that we most fully know that God is love. In turn, the child of God is to love God supremely. In what has been termed the exaggerated language of contrast, Jesus on one occasion said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The words immediately following the preceding are: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." Evidently supreme love for Christ and the bearing of a cross are equated.

Furthermore, Christians are to love one another. How much? Jesus said, "As I have loved you" (John 15:12). How much had he loved them and how much does he love us: enough to give his life on the cross. We are to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).

We are not only to love our fellow Christians, we are to love our neighbor, and he is anyone in need. This love is even to reach out to enemies. Surely such love necessitates self-denial, self-sacrifice symbolized by the

cross. It is the *agape* type or quality of love that has this spirit of self-giving.

The cross, "the supreme paradox of all time," as a symbol expresses and breathes life into some of the great paradoxes of the Gospel. Those paradoxes set forth some of the most significant truths of our Christian faith. They express in different words and ways the fact that resurrection follows crucifixion not only in the life of Christ but also in the life of his disciple. One of those paradoxes stated by Jesus on more than one occasion was that exaltation comes through humility (Matt. 23:1-12; Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14). He also plainly taught that greatness comes through service (Matt. 20:26-27; 23:11; Mark 9:35) and that life comes through death (Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25).

Another paradox particularly prevalent in the Pauline epistles is that the free man in Christ is to surrender his freedom and become a slave of Christ and a servant of man. For example, he says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity to the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (Gal. 5:13). Real freedom comes through enslavement to Christ and his way of life. Without the cross, the preceding and other paradoxes of the gospel would be meaningless.

Application to Life

Just as Christ is our "eternal contemporary," likewise his cross, its message and spirit, is relevant for every age and every problem. It is the cross that reconciles us to one another and "to God in one body." This reconciliation brings "hostility to an end" (Eph. 2:16), whether that hostility is based on national origin, culture, economic class, race, or religion.

The spirit symbolized by the cross is to be applied personally by the Christian. We are not just to talk about it; we are to seek as best we can to take up our cross and follow Christ. This means, among other things, that we are to love our enemies that we may be like our Father who sends rain and sunshine upon the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:43-45). It means that we are not to give primary consideration to what we think is right for us to do, but we are to think in terms of what others think and the effect that our behavior will have upon others and particularly upon the cause of Christ (1 Cor. 10:24, 31). The way of the cross will remain for the best of us an aspiration rather than an actual achievement. But we should seek as best we can to move constantly in it and toward it.

The spirit symbolized by the cross is also to be applied to the broader social relations and problems of life. The cross is central in the Christian social strategy. It is the Christian method of social change. This involves the returning of good for evil, the strong serving the weak, the privileged taking the initiative in working out the problems of the underprivileged, even the just to a degree taking upon themselves the sins of the unjust.

This means that voluntary self-giving with a redemptive purpose or goal which can properly be called an

ethic of the cross is abidingly relevant for our world and its problems. The cross is God's strategy for overcoming sin, not only in the individual's life but also in the life of the world.

Let us sum up by saying that the cross and what it symbolizes is the central distinctive unifying element in original Christianity, including its ethic. We must in the contemporary period return to this central emphasis, must understand more clearly what the cross means in

the Christian's life, and must apply more consistently the ethic of the cross if we are to revitalize contemporary Christianity and make the Christian religion a vital factor in meeting the world's needs. "The way of the cross leads home" for the individual, but it is also the way of social reconstruction and moral reformation.

*This article is an excerpt from T. B. Maston's book, **Why Live the Christian Life?***

ON THE ETHICS FRONT

By
W. Perry Crouch
**Former General Secretary of the General Board
of the Baptist State Convention of North
Carolina**

At least as early as the period following World War II, North Carolina Baptists began to feel the need to deal forthrightly with the ethical teachings of the Bible. With the changes brought about by two tragic world wars and a great depression, our people were facing both temptations and opportunities they had never before experienced. North Carolina Baptists were wanting to be involved in interpreting and applying scriptural principles for every area of life. Furthermore, the young pastors and lay people were pressing for help to "be the church in the world" in new and effective ways.

Why? Many pastors faced the years following World War II with a growing commitment to give more time and attention to the moral and social concerns emphasized in the New Testament. The war had brought about quick marriages which resulted in a great increase in the number of divorces; and our homes were facing new problems as a result of these divorces. Juvenile delinquency was increasing rapidly. The race problem was unresolved. Our people were moving to new communities and facing new moral challenges and social problems beyond anything they had previously experienced.

These problems seemed to group themselves around two main concerns: (1) the relationships of our colleges and other institutions with the government and (2) guidance for individual Christians facing the changing religious, economic, and social issues of our modern world.

To meet the first area of concern about church-state relations, a committee on public affairs was named at each annual session of the North Carolina Baptist State Convention with instructions to study and report to the next Convention. In the second area of general social concerns, persons were named on a Christian Life Committee with instructions to study and report to the next annual session of the Convention.

These two committees usually met separately, perhaps once during the convention year. The idea back of the committees was good; but after several

years, the persons who served on these committees realized the impossibility of any comprehensive study and effective action in the brief time provided in one or two short meetings. Moreover, the committees often overlapped in their attempt to offer help related to moral issues.

In the 1960s the North Carolina Baptist State Convention's General Board proposed to the Convention in annual session that a Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs replace both of the previously authorized standing committees. The Council would be composed of twenty-eight members, including some from the General Board, some from faculties of colleges and social service institutions, and some at-large members. They would serve four years with a rotation system so that there would always be experienced persons on the Council. They would meet at least twice each year for a full day or more. The chairman of the Council would serve on the General Board of the Convention, thus keeping the discussions and recommendations tied closely to all of the work of the Convention. With positive action by the Convention, the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs became a reality and began work with strong support and great enthusiasm. Almost every year the convention referred issues to the Council for study and action.

However, there was still a problem. Who would research the issues to be studied? Who would prepare materials for each Council meeting? Who would see that the discussions of the Council were prepared in pamphlet form for distribution to our people? Who would act on a continuing basis? The need for a trained leader and an office with facilities to do the work assigned to the Council was increasingly obvious. In the early 1970s this need was met when the General Board created the office of Director of the Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs. Charles Petty, who had served for several years on the staff of the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission and who had earned the Doctor of Theology degree with a major in Christian ethics at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary became the first Director of the Council.

The Council on Christian Life and Public Affairs has proved itself to be a blessing to North Carolina Baptists. I strongly recommend the idea of such an agency to every Baptist state convention.

TWENTY YEARS WITH THE CLC: An Interview with Foy Valentine

LIGHT interviewed Foy Valentine on his twentieth anniversary with the Christian Life Commission to acquaint our readers better with him.

LIGHT: When did you become the Christian Life Commission's executive director?

Valentine: Twenty years ago on June 1, 1960.

LIGHT: What did you find when you got to work?

Valentine: A budget of \$31,500, a temporary office secretary, and a vast reservoir of ill will.

LIGHT: Sounds shaky. Why did you take the job?

Valentine: I took the job out of what I understood to be the clear call of God. In twenty years I have never questioned that call nor doubted that it was from God. And besides, that is not all I found when I arrived in 1960. I found that the Christian Life Commission, and the cause of applied Christianity for which the agency stood, had a strong corps of deeply dedicated, hard working, active supporters.

LIGHT: Did you start your Christian Life Commission work from scratch?

Valentine: Oh, no. Not at all. I stood on the shoulders of Dr. A. C. Miller, my immediate predecessor who for seven years had courageously and wisely steered the agency's tiny vessel through extraordinarily troubled waters. Of course, he and I both were debtors to Dr. Hugh Brimm, the Commission's first director who was the one who really did start from scratch in 1948. All three of us, however, stood on the shoulders of such stalwarts as Dr. J. B. Weatherspoon who was chairman of the Commission when it was first funded through the Cooperative Program in 1948 and Dr. A. J. Barton who preceded him as the Commission's chairman for about twenty-five years before that.

LIGHT: What other forces had been at work to prepare the way for the Commission's remarkable growth in the last twenty years?

Valentine: Primarily, Bible-believing Southern Baptist people who knew well that the Christian gospel has profound meaning in daily life and that our Baptist heritage calls for involvement in the world not withdrawal from it.

LIGHT: Anybody else?

Valentine: Yes, especially the Christian ethics professors in the Southern Baptist seminaries, men like Dr. T. B. Maston, Dr. Weatherspoon, and Dr. O. T. Binkley who, with their hard-working associates, were teaching, writing, and speaking widely among Southern Baptists in support of applied Christianity.

LIGHT: When you came to the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, what past experience in your own life did you find most helpful?

Valentine: Seven years of breaking new ground with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission. Those were exciting years of vigorous growth for that state Baptist ethics agency and of invaluable experience to me.

LIGHT: Who influenced your life to prepare you for these decades of special Christian ministry?

Valentine: My mother and father, without any doubt, exerted the greatest influence at this point in my life. That influence started before I can remember and lasted until they both died in their eightieth years not long ago. My father regularly prayed with us before we ate together. My mother carefully studied the Bible and conscientiously sought to lead me to do so. Generally we would pray together before bedtime, particularly in the winter before a dying fire in the fireplace. My father, sometimes to my dismay, would talk to me from time to time about honesty, race, morals, and integrity. Both carefully and responsibly sought to lead their sons, as I said in the preface to the first book I ever wrote, to "believe and behave." Not a day now passes but that I rise up and call them blessed.

LIGHT: Anybody else?

Valentine: Yes, I should mention Clarence Jordan and T. B. Maston.

LIGHT: Along that line, would you tell how you became a Christian?

Valentine: As a boy not yet twelve, I came under very real conviction for sin. Even then I had a reasonably clear, and I know now theologically accurate, understanding that sin was basically missing God's mark for my life. In a summer revival at the open country Texas Baptist church where my deacon daddy led the singing and my deeply committed Christian mother taught Sunday School, the visiting preacher, who was taking a meal in our home, spoke to me privately after dinner.

Without any manipulation or high pressuring at all, he laid the claims of Christ before me. I made no commitment to him; and, as I recall, he asked for none. Nevertheless, before the week was over I made a definite commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, publicly professed my commitment to Him, and was baptized—in the most important week of my life.

LIGHT: How would you sum up the message you have sought to preach from the Christian Life Commission platform?

Valentine: That the Christian faith is both individual and social. No greater heresy has ever beset the Christian church than that which has separated the personal from the social, evangelism from ethics, faith from works, root from branch, words from deeds. Those who insist that the gospel of God in Christ is primarily individual fragment the good news; and those who insist that it is primarily social fracture the New Testament. Actually, the individual and the social are two sides of one coin, two edges of one sword. Each is incomplete without the other. Both are divine imperatives. If God's good news gets through to the lost world, both imperatives must be kept in clear perspective.

LIGHT: How have Southern Baptists changed with regard to Christian social concern and Christian social action in the last two decades?

Valentine: We are no longer shamelessly beating the dead horse of the "social gospel." We have begun to recover our Baptist heritage of responsible involvement in the political arena. We have refused to keep wearing around our necks the dead albatross of racism. We generally preach the whole gospel more faithfully now than we did then. We now have Christian Life Commissions, or their counterparts, in seven of the state Baptist conventions, with several more in the making. We have distributed uncounted millions of pamphlets, written hundreds upon hundreds of articles, and published scores of books in support of applied Christianity. And we have substantially expanded our total Southern Baptist witness for personal morality and for public righteousness.

LIGHT: Has the controversy which has sometimes characterized the Christian Life Commission been good or bad for the Convention?

Valentine: Maybe it has been partly bad and partly good. Controversy as an end in itself is never desirable. Struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil and struggle for freedom, righteousness, and justice, however, are simply not optional. In the moral universe where God has put us as free moral agents, Christians have no choice but to contend for right. Even on such moral issues as alcohol, race, separation of church and state, divorce, capital punishment, abortion, and war, there has never been, nor will there ever be, complete unanimity of opinion among Baptists. God's people are obligated to keep struggling toward the ideal, nevertheless, even when the struggle precipitates controversy. I endure that cross of controversy if not gladly then at least resolutely for Christ's sake and for the sake of Southern Baptists.

LIGHT: How do you evaluate the Commission's current strength and influence?

Valentine: With a dozen full-time employees and a budget this year of about \$550,000, the agency is still small; but it is not weak. And is not ineffective. Many moral battles have not been won; but some have been. Some Southern Baptists may not be convinced that the gospel is relevant in daily life; but most Southern Baptists are. From my perspective, the Commission has paid off far more than one hundred cents on every dollar Southern Baptists have invested in the agency.

LIGHT: What is the future of Christian social concern and Christian social action among Southern Baptists?

Valentine: Good. Strong. Bright. We have the biblical base. We have the theological roots. We have the moral commitment. We have the social perception. We have the qualified workers. We are not a convention that can be properly identified either as a spaced-out sect on the radical right or a morally rudderless, death-wish-harboring group on the radical left. It is my honest opinion that no church family in America today is as well positioned and as adequately prepared as are Southern Baptists to work effectively in Christian social ethics in the decade of the 1980s.

LIGHT: How would you like for your work with the Christian Life Commission to be remembered?

Valentine: As Bible-based, Christ-honoring, Spirit-led, cross-bearing, people-oriented, issue-sensitized, prophetically uncompromising hard work to help changed people change the world.

"No greater heresy has ever beset the Christian church than that which has separated the personal from the social, evangelism from the ethics, faith from works, root from branch, words from deeds."

A Pastor and the CLC

By John R. Claypool

Some thirty or forty years ago, a rugged "Lone Ranger" individualism characterized the way most Southern Baptists struggled with their moral and social problems. However, that has largely changed today so that we actually have a much more open, free, and interactive way of coping with our moral dilemmas. People now are used to having "counselors" around from junior high school on, and are encouraged to ask for help and seek out guidance and advice from a variety of sources. This single societal shift has great implications for the practicing pastor.

More people than ever look to their minister as "a moral tutor." They want light, not only on exclusively theological concerns, but also on the moral issues related to personal behavior and public involvement. This puts a special burden on the pastor to stay abreast of the issues and to answer with depth and wisdom the moral inquiries that are posed.

The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention was founded to help pastors and all Southern Baptists in this area of applied Christianity. In a variety of ways, it seeks to interpret the signs of the times and offer insight into the appropriate Christian response to these issues and events. I have personally been greatly helped by many of the National Seminars that the Commission has been sponsoring annually for some fifteen years. I have found these *the finest single continuing education resources* that our denomination makes available to practicing clergy. I have also used extensively the *Issues and Answers* series of pamphlets to help lay persons on specific issues. A few years ago

the Commission distributed to every Southern Baptist pastor and education director Bill Pinson's excellent *Resource Guide to Current Issues*. Again and again I have used this work to locate materials for sermons and have found it unfailingly helpful. The ministry of the written word is a very important aspect of how the Christian Life Commission attempts to be "a moral tutor to moral tutors" in preparing ministers for their counseling and guidance tasks.

I have also served as a member of the Commission itself for several years, and know from within the kind of deliberations that are always going on as to how to effectively enliven the conscience of our Convention and to help Southern Baptists develop Christian social concern and do Christian social action. Many times at the annual Convention sessions, resolutions or reports from the Commission have occasioned careful thought and stimulated sharp debate. This is one aspect of authentic Christian ministry—not to let people evade those great moral issues that are of life-and-death importance. I believe that history will show that, although not always successful in the given moment, the Commission has been faithful here.

The publication you are now reading, *LIGHT*, is yet another way that the Christian Life Commission has devised "to overcome the darkness." All Christians should want to be part of the answer and not part of the problem, and being helpful collaborators in such a process is the role this Commission seeks to fulfill. I am honored to have been a part of its processes for the last two decades and firmly believe its finest hours of service lie in the decade of the eighties just before us.

John R. Claypool is pastor of Northminster Baptist Church, Jackson, Mississippi, and chairman of the Christian Life Commission.



Christian Life Commission

Of The Southern Baptist Convention

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