

Regular Baptist Review



"A Perspective of Historic Regular Baptist Principles"

Dr. Richard A. Harris, Editor

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NIAGARA FALLS IN PERSPECTIVE

Absolutely spectacular! Niagara Falls is a stupendous display of God's creative acts and of nature's power. It is one of my favorite places. I love it and always will. It is breathtaking. To view that awesome sight of millions of gallons of water pouring over the precipice into the gorge below can't help but give us all a sense of insignificance.

The Falls also reminds us of how man's greatest efforts are oftentimes destroyed on the rocks of human failure. What a noble effort our fathers made to found a Fellowship free of conventionism and denominationalism. We're thankful for their efforts. We have enjoyed the fruits of their labors for many years.

However, the Fifty-ninth Annual Conference of the GARBC, fulfilled every

expectation of a watershed. Tragically, the vote that was finally taken was not a vote on the conflict of interest in the Council but a referendum on a painted perception of Regular Baptists for Revival. Frankly, if RBR really were what it was painted to be, I would have voted negatively also. Forty percent voted positively however, indicating a good deal of understanding.

Regardless, the vote was lost. We are sorry that a false impression was permitted to be formed. We were a position, not a powerblock. It is imperative now that the RBR be removed as the issue so that the position can be emphasized and propagated, even by those who may not have voted positively in Niagara. The correctness of the position will be recognized by good

men everywhere and no amount of "convention" tactics will successfully suppress it. Men's names may be different but truth will always prevail.

I am sure that many of you who were not able to attend the Conference, might wish that I would detail events and attitudes that took place. I do not feel that is my responsibility. It is yours to seek out the facts. I am satisfied that I have fulfilled God's purpose for me in this chapter of GARBC history.

I am thankful for and proud of those men who stood graciously and faithfully for the historic purpose of our Fellowship. Frankly, I believe the vote of the local churches has yet to be taken. (Ed.)

**A sincere Thank You
to the hundreds
of
pastors and laymen
who supported us in
this effort through
your prayers
and letters.
May God
strengthen your
stand and encourage
you to attempt great
exploits for His glory!**

REGULAR BAPTIST REVIEW CEASES PUBLICATION

The *Regular Baptist Review* is being laid to rest. This is the final edition. We believe it has accomplished the purpose for which it was begun. It will quietly disappear, but the Biblical principles for which it stood will go on living in the hearts and actions of hundreds of pastors and churches.

The *Review's* short life was given to raise the issues that needed to be faced in the GARBC. Sadly, some chose to make the *Review* itself, the issue. We're sorry for that. We wish we could have talked personally with everyone who received it but that was obviously impossible. We are not sorry however, for the way God used it. We have no regrets and no apologies to make. We have tried to be gracious in each issue as the facts were presented. We hope we have succeeded. •

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

In our previous issue of the Regular Baptist Review, we published a letter sent to the Council of Eighteen requesting a meeting with them before the opening of the Niagara Falls Conference. They granted us that meeting on Monday morning, June 25th. Sixteen other pastors met with me and the Council. Observers were invited also. The room was full and a lively two hour discussion ensued.

In fairness to those who could not be there, we are publishing below Dr. Harris' opening remarks at that meeting. The leadership's unparalleled attack at the Conference was their response.

Thank you, Dr. Nettleton!

I appreciate all of you Council members and other pastors, and your willingness to take time out to meet together this morning. I was also grateful for the prayer time. We are all familiar with Psalm 127:1, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it, except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

We are here to personally and positively present our position to you in a face-to-face meeting so that you can hear our perspective of everything. Our purpose is to try to bring some unity of understanding and interpretation. Scripture says, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure and then peaceable."

As I stated in my letter, "The crucial struggle to keep our Association on course ought to be the mutual aspiration of every one of us and no momentous conference such as this one should be entered into without thorough and careful discussion." It is not my purpose today to look backward in order to bring recriminations or to place blame but to look ahead so that we might think carefully about where the Association is heading. I am not going to talk about name calling or vitriolic attacks. We have probably all received our share of

vicious letters and there is no point in comparing notes. We cannot control the pens or tongues of those who agree with us, anymore than you can control those who agree with you. We have strong convictions but we have tried to express them in gentlemanly fashion and intend to continue to do so.

We need to remind ourselves of a few very important points. First, we are continuing to ask for a revival of emphasis on our original purpose clause. This is not just another issue, like election, or the issue of Bible versions. It is the very heart of our cause and the very purpose for which the Association exists. Without our dedicated allegiance to the purpose clause of the Fellowship and its clear doctrine of "secondary separation," there is no real reason for us to be here or to meet in annual conference. It is this clause that gives purpose to every activity we pursue.

Secondly, this is not just a personal issue. We are not out to get anyone, and since God is no respecter of persons, neither are we. If a person chooses to take sides and then distort any statement as a personal attack on him, that is his own choice but our emphasis has been on the revival of our original cause, not personalities.

Third, it is not a question of the control of the Association. It is the reputation and image that the Association holds in a confused religious world that concerns us. It is whether men and churches will want to be in fellowship with us if we continue to broaden our position. I can only speak for myself but I'm sure other men feel as I when I say that I have no desire to be in a leadership position in GARBC. I have too many outside responsibilities to carry already. But neither can I afford to watch the paralyzing of our Fellowship without speaking up.

Fourth, it is not a question of the control of agencies either. We neither want to control them ourselves, nor do we want the Association to control them. We do desire, however, that our

agencies become acutely aware of where we stand as an Association and not embarrass us as a Fellowship if they desire to have GARBC's continued approval.

In short, I believe the proposed amendment is both necessary and wise and that the Council of 18 would serve the Association well if it reversed itself and encouraged the messengers to support it. Let me explain why.

We are living in days of massive compromise and deception. The Satanic activity in the religious and political world of the eighties and nineties makes the apostasy of the major denominations in the twenties and thirties look tame in comparison. The subtle storm that swept through the churches of America in those bygone days which gave birth to the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches has now developed into a hellish hurricane that threatens to destroy our Christian culture. The need for an aggressive, militant voice for the truth of God, has never been needed as much as it is needed today.

Sadly, however, many churches and pastors have withdrawn from the warfare. There is widespread confusion today even among our own ranks, as my mail and probably your mail indicates. "Truth is fallen in the streets," Isaiah said. Jeremiah, who also lived in an awesome day of declension warned, "They are not valiant for the truth upon the earth." As a result, people are looking for help in the wrong places and finding only broken cisterns.

We face two problems relative to this in our Fellowship. One, there are new and deceptive Satanic attacks upon the truth which our people have never faced before and they need answers. Pastors and people alike, look to leadership for help and this is why conferences like this are of such importance. Secondly, too many men from a new generation have

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failed to understand the old battles which made us what we are. As one man put it: "Every farmer takes care of his 'line fence' because it defines the borders of his farm. If all line fences were torn down, things would go on fairly well for the generation which knew where the fence used to be. However, there would be trouble in time to come with generations who never knew where the fence used to be. New Evangelicalism's founding fathers tore down the fence and today's generation can't remember where it was." What we are simply asking for is a reaffirmation of where the fence should be and for pointed and scholarly answers to the new issues that face us. What we are getting may be "nice times of fellowship" but not the meat we need on which to survive and which will separate us as a special people.

Let me give you a little history of events and show why we believe that the Council and others have actually created the *Regular Baptist Review* and brought us to where we are today. It was in 1985 at Springfield while observing the Council of 18 that the alarm really went off for me. On our return home from that Conference, my wife said to me, "I have never seen you so disturbed after a meeting as you are now." She was right, LABC had defected and it shook me. We do not blame the Council for its defection, though in retrospect, perhaps more could have been done to avoid it. What really alarmed me was our reaction to it. According to the leadership, this was no big thing! We were more concerned about defending ourselves from criticism than what should be done for the future. When the Resolutions Committee read a good resolution to the Council for presentation to the messengers (I was an Observer), one Council member arose and said, and I quote, "I'm not going to vote for that resolution. That's like taking yourself out behind the woodshed. I move that we reject it and ask the Education Committee to write a new one." This was done but I submit to you, brethren, that sometimes in our Christian lives, we do find it necessary to take ourselves out behind the wood-

shed and do a little soul searching in order to have God's blessing. Where were our tears for such a great loss? Our reaction was more of denial than that anything serious had occurred. After all, John MacArthur wasn't that bad and we even heard some defense of him while he was mailing to all of our churches. That was the closest thing to a "cover up" I had ever seen.

Yes, I was visibly shaken. After returning home, I waited for months expecting to hear a clarion call to move us back on target. It never came. Finally, in March of 1986, several pastors and the state representatives along the eastern seaboard met together to discuss and pray for revival within our Fellowship.

We left in 1986 for Grand Rapids, hoping for a change of direction. We were told in no uncertain terms at that Conference that everything was fine even though there were many things that disturbed us. At that time there was no *Regular Baptist Review*. As I left for home, I could not help thinking that denying our problems would not make them go away.

During that year, we held two rallies; one at Parsippany, N.J. and one in Sellersville, PA. We were criticized soundly for holding them.

While going through the lobby in Parsippany on the way to the platform, one young pastor stopped me and asked, "Dr. Harris, did you receive permission from headquarters to hold this rally?" I was tempted to curtly reply, "Yes, the Lord told me this morning it was okay," but I didn't. As I looked at his face, I could tell that this young man was sincere. Though I did not have much time, I tried to explain to him what a Baptist is and that individual soul liberty and the autonomy of the local Church are precious truths to protect and proclaim. That incident scared me!

We still had not started the *Regular Baptist Review*. We left for Ames, Iowa in June 1987. One man got up and placed a resolution on the floor that the Council be more careful about approving agencies. I never heard of him before but I thought to myself: "God bless him for exercising

individual soul liberty." The resolution passed in contradiction to the position of the Council only to have it belittled by leadership later.

It was then that the idea of the *Regular Baptist Review* was born and the first issue was published in the Fall of 1987 with a call for a revival of our original purpose. In the following Winter Issue we discussed the Approval System and began to ask ourselves the question: Why is it so hard to make a correction in the course of our Fellowship? We dealt with the issue of the Conservative Baptists and asked why we wanted to build bridges to them.

We then went to Anaheim, California in 1988 and received the distinct impression that any move to rock the boat would be met with resistance. Observers were limited at the Council meeting. The Northwest issue and its relationship to Dr. Pickering was overlooked, and the Western issue of building bridges to the Conservative Baptists was overlooked. A resolution on the blood of Christ was almost rejected because it might offend the friends of John MacArthur and a resolution on the first six literature items was almost refused until pressure came to introduce it. I was still waiting to hear the challenge to pick up the armor for our cause. It did not come.

We continued to try to educate. Bryce Augsburg prepared a message for our rally at Kansas City entitled, "Please Call Me a Separatist," emphasizing the need for an open aggressive stand. He went home to be with the Lord two days before the Conference began so we printed his message in the next issue of the *Review*.

It was evident some vehicle was going to have to be used in Columbus to bring our Fellowship to the point of decision regarding our direction. Why must we remain apologetic for our cause? Many steps could have been taken. Should we propose dropping the approval system about which there is much concern? No, that was too drastic a step and needed long term discussion before even considering it. Some wanted us to attack every de-

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"Council" conclusion

viation of our agencies and sent a great deal of material. I have not printed it. Mudslinging seldom accomplishes anything positive. The messengers of the Association do not approve agencies anyway. These issues needed to be dealt with in a more private forum.

It was finally realized that an Amendment was needed to create an objective Council that was free from as many entangling alliances and conflicts of interest as possible, to encourage them to take a bold, courageous, and open stand for our original heritage. We must preach and proclaim Biblical holiness and separation and let the chips fall where they may in our agencies and in our churches. Witch-hunts are negative and destructive but the positive proclamation of the truth attended by the work of the Holy Spirit can accomplish great things. The Amendment was openly proposed long before the Conference in Columbus and presented as fairly as possible.

This past year has been a year of debate. We ought not to be afraid of controversy. God can accomplish great things through us when our nest is stirred and as we launch out in faith in dependence upon Him. However, there has been a great deal of misinterpretation of our position, therefore we have

requested this meeting together so that we might understand each other better.

In closing, I will try to reveal to you the feelings of our hearts. The first thing for which we are praying is a clear, consistent and clarion call back to a revival of emphasis on our original purpose in the light of today's events. We must reunite our Fellowship but around what will it unite?

Secondly, we need to see national conferences that will unite us together in a bold stand for righteousness. It can still be defined and the standard needs to be raised again. We cannot fear the consequences. It is God's cause, not ours. Men do not join organizations. They join causes, and our cause is Scriptural and right. Strong preaching on the issues of our day can challenge and encourage men across our nation.

Third, it is our feeling that the vast majority of our churches want the GARBC to be in actuality what it says it is on paper. We are a Fellowship based on principles not just preferences. No organization that ever compromised shouted they were going to do so from the housetop. Our nation is strewn with the wreckage of religious organizations that had sound doctrine on paper but which simply ignored them. We don't want that to happen to us.

We don't believe we are being unreasonable. The Council could shut down the *Regular Baptist Review* tomorrow by simply respecting the need for eternal vigilance and picking up the very cause which should unite us anyway. This amendment is only symbolic of our desire to return to an objective and uninhibited Council that will take an uncompromising and aggressive stand on secondary separation. This amendment is the least possible step we could have taken to alert and encourage men to think and talk about the dangers that could befall us. We encourage you to find common ground of agreement together with us and make a united presentation to the messengers.

I Kings 14:26 says, "And he (Shishak) took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made. And king Rehoboam made in their stead brassen shields and committed them into the hands of the chief of the guard which kept the door of the king's house."

Will we also exchange gold for brass? Will we fritter away our future? If so, many churches will no longer deem the shields of brass worth fighting for and our strength will be dissipated. I appeal to you as a Council to join together and practice what we have purposed.

Copies of all issues of the **REGULAR BAPTIST REVIEW** are still available. There were 12 issues. If you would like a set or sets, we would appreciate a love gift of \$10.00/set to help cover costs of publication and postage..

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