

Regular Baptist Review



"A Perspective of Historic Regular Baptist Principles"

Dr. Richard A. Harris, Editor

Winter 1990



NIAGARA FALLS: GARBC WATERSHED!

Dr. Richard A. Harris

The Niagara Falls GARBC Conference this year will be a watershed for our beloved Fellowship. Historically a watershed is a point of division, as between two periods of history, when factors of change cause events to flow in different directions. Some, who are working toward change away from our original purpose will disagree. Others will be totally unaware and will not realize it until years later. However, many of us who have spent nearly thirty years in the Fellowship know that this is a watershed year. To clarify the reason why is the intention of this issue of the Review.

The decade of the Eighties has seen the peak, the stagnation, and the beginnings of retreat within our Association, which among other things is causing a continuing decline in the number of fellowshipping churches. Try

as we might, we cannot make forward progress, because we are no longer settled as to our direction. We are like a boat full of oarsmen who have lost their rhythm and unity, and are each rowing as individuals. The ship of state is making many ripples but basically going nowhere.

When some of us have raised a voice, appealing for unity and revival around the one thing which makes our Fellowship unique, leadership has stiffened and resisted. The original intent of forming Regular Baptists for Revival was to sound the alarm, that we might "repent, and do the first works" (Rev. 2:5) and return to the original purpose clause of our Association Constitution, thereby providing for a unity and harmony in endeavor. Rather than take an objective look at the drift causing the

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A PERSONAL APPEAL

The churches are stirring. Everywhere, pastors and laymen are awakening to the present dangers facing us in the GARBC. Courageous and Spirit-led leadership is needed, and great care is required.

There is no question that the issues are momentous. The preservation and future of our Fellowship is at stake. It is because of this that we must be Christian statesmen. We must contend for right but not be contentious. We must stand for correctness of position, not for or against persons. Critics will say this is a personality problem, but that is not so. Let us not allow it to become so. May we be godly gladiators glorifying our King.

Face the issues, we must and we will. Among recent, unfortunate facts are:

- 1). One agency has defected from our Regular Baptist cause (LABC).
- 2). One institution has requested the resignation of a good, separatist President, Dr. Ernest D. Pickering (NBS).
- 3). One college retains professors and trustees from Conservative Baptist churches, the very group the GARBC separated from years ago, when we left the Northern Baptist Convention. (WBC)

The effectiveness of the approval system, the Council of 18 and the virility of our Association is being put to the test. Let us be tenacious in our determination to do right, and do it in as godly a fashion as possible. (Ed.) ■

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lack of unity, some want to ignore it.

It is obvious that a few GARBC pastors see no problem in the Association. One pastor wrote recently, "I am troubled by the appeal to the 'historic regular baptist.' It seems that whenever you desire to champion a cause, you appeal to this 'historic regular baptist' position. As a committed Regular Baptist, I appreciate our heritage and position. However, one should not use this phrase as a convenient catch-all. Secondly, there are some things under this 'historic regular baptist' banner which were not good." We wonder what our approved colleges are teaching our preacher boys on this topic. It appears that we have sunk into an abysmal lack of knowledge about what makes us unique.

Why is this occurring? First, no concerted national effort has been made for many years, to articulate our historic purpose and position, nor to evaluate and compare it with present religious trends. As a result, large groups of individuals are no longer clearly conscious of, nor deeply committed to, the reason for our existence.

Secondly, Association leadership is becoming entrenched and rigid. Conventionism is beginning to creep across our national Fellowship. Men are held up to ridicule who dare to differ from the party line. Our churches have not been on an equal par with our agencies, in terms of opportunity to attend Council sessions. Attendance was not so essential in the past, for pastors had confidence in our Council. Now, we are condescendingly told by the Council what is good for us.

Third, we have failed to develop an organizational structure, which maintains a definite objectivity between the Council of Eighteen (which is supposed to represent the churches), and the agencies (which the Council is to assist, exhort, and approve). It is the agencies, especially our colleges and seminaries, which affect and influence the pastors and churches, and sometimes in directions which they do not wish to go, and should not go.

Our agency leaders carry tremendous loads of responsibility, and they need our encouragement. This amend-

ment should in no way be construed as a personal attack upon them. In the long run the separation of powers would help them. Their advice and counsel can and will always be sought. However, they also need our warnings at times. If we fail to challenge and correct, the agencies will soon find themselves out of touch with the churches.

Rev. David G. Hill, Associate Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Rochester, Minnesota, published an article some time ago entitled, "Crucial Principles For Today's Churches." which is most pertinent:

"The struggle of maintaining a truly Christian educational philosophy in our Christian colleges, Bible institutes and seminaries today also carries a virus - the virus of the spirit of our age. It is constantly present, looking for an opportunity through some spiritual weakness to infect the whole system. We must be on the alert to subtle changes in the philosophy of education. Any such change in philosophy, no matter how subtle or seemingly insignificant, will result in a complete capitulation of our Biblical mandate to total cooperation with the god of this age. This is a present reality in some schools that were once among the finest and most trusted. . . . Francis Schaeffer reminded us, 'To accommodate to the world spirit about us in our age is the most gross form of worldliness in the proper definition of the word.' If accommodation of this type is permitted to exist in our schools, our churches will soon be infected by the virus also. Already we see the infection in advanced stages in churches that once knew Biblical holiness and the stigma of being distinct from the world around them. One country preacher remarked that 'most churches are so worldly you would have to backslide in order to be in fellowship!'"

So we come to the crux of the entire matter. Twice the messengers from our churches have courteously instructed the Council of Eighteen. There has been little response, except to "dig in." Can the churches express themselves in an effective way, so as to be heard and take back the reins of our Fellowship again?

We are asking our Association to

correct some organizational flaws, which will enable the Council to know whom they represent and be able to deal with the issues. In response to the recent Information Bulletin from the Home Office, Rev. Charles Bergerson of Ankeny, Iowa wrote a letter describing the problem clearly:

"There is herein [the Information Bulletin] no addressing of the issue of concern: the neo-evangelicalism and the compromise with Conservative Baptist personnel and thought as present in the two remaining western schools approved by the GARBC. The Council of 18 has not done its job in guarding the historic and needed Association position on separational issues. LABC had already slipped away because of the Council's not holding to that school's retention of proper separational standards. What is needed is a set of men who hold themselves in trust to the declared separational standards and who will not equivocate nor hedge! . . . The whole point is: LACK OF SEPARATIONAL CONVICTION AND FORTITUDE!"

Does anybody really believe that the amendment is only about who is on the Council? It is about organizing the Council to be able to act in favor of Biblical separation as required by our Constitution. This is why Niagara Falls will be a watershed for the GARBC. **If the Fellowship cannot muster the necessary 2/3 vote to pass the amendment, there will be no mechanism whereby we can adjust our course in the future.** If this can be accomplished however, the fight for the Faith can continue, and the Council will know that the churches still hold them accountable for the sacred duty of facing the issues and acting on them properly.

In a letter to pastors, Rev. Lloyd L. Streeter, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in LaSalle, Illinois, stated: *"The fact is that if the GARBC returns to a policy of approving only schools and agencies that practice secondary separation, that will be a revival of our original purpose. That is what the Regular Baptists for Revival would like to see happen. That would be a good and spiritual move on the part of the Asso-*

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ciation. But personally, I do not ever expect it to happen as long as there are agency men on the Council.”

If this conflict of interest (agency men on the Council) cannot be removed, then the GARBC has for all practical purposes changed its course. The GARBC will continue, but in a different direction than its founders intended, and a return will be unlikely. The Association may limp along for years, or it may find new life from the interdenominational and neo-evangelical crowds. Regardless, with its new emphasis to combine rather than separate, the GARBC will never be the same. It may look the same, but it will have lost touch with Biblical separation - the very essence of its founding and contributions to fundamentalism in the past.■

STAND UP AND HOLLER!

Many years ago, Dr. Robert T. Ketcham, National Representative of the GARBC from 1948 - 1960, came to a small town to speak in a small church for a young pastor. After the evening service, Dr. Ketcham and the pastor were conversing. The topic came up of keeping the GARBC on course. Dr. Ketcham made the point that Baptist churches, being independent, cannot join anything. The pastor inquired as to how the Association could be kept pure, if wayward churches cannot be disciplined out of it. Dr. Ketcham’s answer was so simple and yet so profound. “Keep the preaching hot, and stand up and holler against compromise.” His counsel is just as wise today as the day he gave it.■

INFORMATION BULLETIN 11/89: A Response

**Dr. Ralph G. Colas
Council Member - 15 Years**

In November, 1989, an Information Bulletin was dispatched from the Home Office addressing the topic, “*Who Should Serve On The Council of Eighteen?*” It was prepared, or at least endorsed by Dr. Paul N. Tassell, our National Representative, whom we appreciate, but with whom we differ. Inasmuch as the amendment to the GARBC Constitution, placed before the Association, was considered important enough to evoke a 4-page Bulletin for the constituency, we consider it likewise appropriate that a response be promulgated. We hasten to add however, that we are sorry that our National Representative has inappropriately injected himself into a very sensitive discussion among the churches of our Fellowship. We desire that issues be faced on their merits and not on the basis of personalities.

Point 1: Our National Representative has deemed it necessary and wise, that he take a position regarding the amendment, and further that he must promote his views to a nationwide audience. This is indicated by the dissemination of the Bulletin. It was also proven earlier by his words last year in Columbus, when at the end of his session, he said something to the effect

that no one had asked him his opinion of the amendment, but he would express it anyway. In a similar vein, and also at Columbus, he had felt it necessary and wise to criticize a motion about an agency, passed by the messengers, which differed from the earlier position taken by the Council of 18. This occurred despite his frequent proclamations, that “*You don’t need me to tell you how to vote.*”

Counterpoint 1: Last Fall, state representatives from some state affiliates had a meeting. One of the items agreed to was that they would not go about promoting the adoption or the rejection of the proposed amendment. Like our National Representative, they are entitled to their own opinions. However, they saw it as inconsistent with their positions to lobby, campaign, crusade, or “politic” for a particular side. A similar stance by our National Representative would be most apropos. We cannot recall an instance in which a previous national representative was so vocal on an item of business before the Association, (relating to organizational structure) to the point of taking sides and telling messengers how to vote.

Such expression of unsolicited

opinion smacks of conventionism. Such partisan behavior is consistent with the original error made by the Council, when immediately after the first reading of the amendment in Columbus, they informed the messengers of the Council’s opposition to the amendment. This prior, out-of-order action, while perhaps giving rise to what our National Representative has done, neither justifies it nor absolves him of it. Possibly the role of a national representative, in terms of who or what he is to represent, needs to be re-examined. One would think that an Association employee would give reasonably equal treatment and exposure to all points of view among fellowshiping church pastors.

Point 2: The amendment is unnecessary, because “*An individual is not really elected as a college president or missionary agency president but as a member of a fellowshiping church.*”

Counterpoint 2: There has probably never been an agency man elected to the Council simply because he was a member of a fellowshiping church. Church membership is merely an eligibility requirement to participate in the official election process. The average GARBC pastor has no idea what church

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an agency man is a member of, or if he is a member of any. They trust the Home Office to enforce this rule. The average GARBC pastor does not know what an agency man represents. Agency men are elected especially due to name recognition of the agency. They do not divest themselves of this tie when they serve.

However, the issue of the amendment is not how or why agency men are elected to the Council, nor whether due to name recognition, they have a better chance of being elected than a pastor does. The paramount issue raised by the amendment is the problem which occurs when agency men sit on the Council, namely a conflict of interest. Though agency men may comprise only a minority of the Council membership, their presence is successful in paralyzing the Council from taking any corrective action against agencies, when they are guilty of a lack of secondary separation. The presence of agency men on the Council becomes an obstruction to the insistence of doctrinal purity on the part of approved agencies, when a separation issue arises. They unwittingly constitute a mutual admiration society within the Council, thus insulating their respective agencies from critical review and any imperative corrective action. Though the Council has no authority to interfere in an agency's operation, it is incumbent upon the Council to warn them, that certain actions may jeopardize their approval status. Fulfilling this obligation on a regular basis would both help agencies and build confidence among our churches.

Point 3: The amendment makes a false assumption that agency men have a “different agenda” from pastors. The Council agenda is “quite simple and rather cut and dried.” “There are no hidden agendas.”

Counterpoint 3: Even if a man is a former pastor, while in the employ of an agency, the man must favor and further that which is most beneficial to the agency, in order to retain the position. If an issue arises concerning which the churches and an agency disagree, the agency wins in the man's thinking and behavior. This is what has occurred in

the recent history of the Council deliberations, which is obvious to all informed pastors. As to the type of agenda the Council has, it would be rather easy to procure former Council testimony regarding whether it is simple, cut and dried.

Point 4: The agency men “are not on the Council to serve their agency constituency but to handle the strictly defined responsibilities of Associational business.”

Counterpoint 4: This is obvious and has never been contested. The problem is not the agency constituency, but the agency itself. Any time an agency compromises separatist doctrine, all the fellowshiping churches in the GARBC are implicated, because the churches and the agency are each a part of the Association. There is some truth to guilt by association. True, separatist, Baptist churches are gradually being forced to practice secondary separation with regard to certain agencies, because the agencies themselves compromise our historic purpose. The amendment represents an attempt to awaken the Council to its traditional duty to warn certain approved agencies, which are compromising, to “clean up their acts,” so fellowship can be restored. If the amendment fails, these churches will have no other option, than to practice secondary separation in reference to the Association as a whole—Biblical truth being much to be preferred than friendship in association, though both are blessed together when possible.

Point 5: The amendment is unwise, because had it been in place, the Association would have missed “the wisdom, spirituality and expertise” of the men listed in the Bulletin. “The financial and personnel management skills of our agency leaders have been of inestimable help to all of us at the Home Office through the years.” “It would be unwise to take such expertise away from the Council.” The amendment leads one to “tamper with a God-blessed system.”

Counterpoint 5: The backgrounds and character of the agency men on the Council have never been in question. It is the bias, prejudice, or predisposition they have for their agencies, which they

bring to the Council, that can get in the way. Every time, the conflict of interest, created by agency men on the Council, impels them to choose loyalty to the agency, rather than adherence to sound practice, when an issue is raised with respect to an agency.

There is no doubt that agency men have skill and expertise, which at times has been quite helpful to the Council and the Association. However, agency men do not have a corner on skill and expertise. If they do, then all Council members should be agency men. Any elected pastors would be undoubtedly able to hold their own and contribute remarkably without the participation of agency men.

We are not sure God blesses systems. Rather, He blesses men who obey His Word. It is true however, that in the course of their obedience, God does give His men wisdom to formulate systems which help accomplish His work in the world. We should be aware that the system in place now was not the system always in existence in the past. There have been major changes along the way, which were not considered “tampering.” Surely we are not in danger of losing God's blessing, or incurring His wrath, because the amendment advocates a change in the system.

Remember, the GARBC did not have a Council at the time of its founding in 1932. It had an executive committee like the Baptist Bible Union. The Council was formed in Waterloo in 1938, six years after the first meeting. The Council of 14 acted as executive for the Association.

A second major change was made in 1948, limiting the members of the Council to two consecutive terms. A third major change was made in 1962, limiting the Council to four agency men, because this very present danger was recognized. A fourth major change was made in 1972, enlarging the Council to 18.

In 1932, no paid employees were envisioned. The men who structured the organization feared that executive secretaries might gain control, as they had in the Northern Baptist Convention. Dr. Ketcham was elected Presi-

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dent in 1934. In 1936-38, his church granted him leave to travel several months each year for the Association. In 1944, at Grand Rapids, twelve years after the first Association, Dr. Van Gilder was employed as full-time Representative. His duties were to edit the official organ and promote the Association among interested, independent Baptist groups.

In 1932, there were no approved agencies of the GARBC. There were no plans to start any agencies, although there were fundamental schools and missions in existence. The system of approval began to develop in 1934. By electing two GARBC men to the board, a mission could be approved as worthy of support by the churches. In 1935, Wealthy Street Baptist Church and Central in Gary became collecting offices for designated missions monies. Between 1938 and 1940, several Baptist missions were added and dropped. Schools did not appear on the list until 1940.

The GARBC of 1990 is not the GARBC of 1932. It is misleading to imply that the amendment would change the structure of the "founding fathers." The plain truth is that many changes of greater magnitude took place through the years. O'Dell says that they "... shunned organization through fear of convention machinery." (*The GARBC and Its Attendant Movements*.) That certainly has changed!

Our National Representative says the amendment "*Tampers with a God-blessed system!*" Which system - the system of 1932, 1938, 1948, 1962 or 1972? We have had five "*God-blessed systems*" in the GARBC.

Point 6: "*We need revival all right, but revival doesn't have to do with the Council of Eighteen makeup.*"

Counterpoint 6: Is there no need for the Council to be alert and watchful? The amendment was introduced, because there are pastors and messengers who believe there is a problem in the GARBC with worldliness, and that the agency men on the Council effectively thwart Council attempts to correct these things in the agencies. Our National Representative makes very strong and unfair implications, that we are not concerned about the need for revival and growth. In over two years of publication, *The Regular Baptist Review* has never implied that concerning him, nor impugned his motives. Is it not a gross misrepresentation of the facts to imply this, because we differ in our answer to the present stagnation? His answer to the problem is another program for growth, which is the same approach pressed by every religious organization in America. Our answer is, "*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you*" (Hosea 10:12). A return to the old ways and the purpose of our founding is what we are seeking. Growth will come to the Association as the Lord adds to each local church. God desires an honest dealing with issues and a facing of failures in humility. Passage of the amendment will make it possible for the Council to deal effectively with compromise in any approved agency. That is a worthy goal, in light of the impact agencies have on churches, but it is only the first step in the right direction. ■

THE BASIC ISSUE

The following is excerpted from a book entitled, *THE NEW EVANGELICALISM*, which was written by Dr. John C. Whitcomb. His remarks very much describe the situation the Association finds itself in today. One might wonder whether Dr. Whitcomb practices his own advice, but regardless, it has the weight of Scriptural truth behind it.

"There is a characteristic tendency on the part of neo-evangelicals to neglect the Biblical safeguards for perpetuating true doctrine. In the kind of world the Bible describes . . . , it is simply impossible to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ without obeying at the same time the Biblical doctrine of separation. God's truth can never change. But God's truth in the hands of human messengers is a very delicate and fragile thing. It is either vigorously proclaimed and defended, or it tends to evaporate within one generation. In the battle for God's truth, there can be no 'trench warfare.' There is either advance into enemy territory by God's Spirit through the Word that is believed and obeyed by His people, or there is sickening and ultimately disastrous retreat. Truth cannot be perpetuated through compromise, and compromise cannot be avoided without separation. . . ."

The argument is often heard . . . that if the doctrinal lines are drawn too closely, the world will not be reached. But the Scriptures make it abundantly clear, that God will see to it, that His people make a proper impression on the world, if they are faithful in obeying God's Word in its totality. How tragic it is for Christians to water down God's revealed message to mankind, simply for the sake of gaining a supposed 'united front' before a watching world!

Some feel that the goal of winning people to Christ is more important than holding faithfully to all the teachings of the Bible. But whatever short-term gains such workers may attain are always at the expense of long term gains. 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he

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FIGHT FOR THE FAITH
STAY TENDER BUT
STRONG
KEEP LOOKING UP
IT WON'T BE LONG!

Regular Baptists For Revival Conference

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Rev. Lloyd L. Streeter - IL

Conference Chairman - Dr. Ralph G. Colas

Host Pastor - Dr. Richard A. Harris

"Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" Psalm 85:6

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also reap' (Gal. 6:7) This applies to Christian workers as well as to the unbelieving! It is important to recognize that no person has ever been won to Christ because of doctrinal compromise, but in spite of it. The fact is that people are being won to Christ, because at least some of the Gospel message has not been compromised. ■

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