

ECHOES FROM THE BAPTIST WORLD CONGRESS

II Corinthians 5:15-21

It was my joyous privilege to attend the twelfth Baptist World Congress in Tokyo, Japan, from July twelfth to the eighteenth inclusive. This was the sixth meeting of the Baptist World Congress which I have attended. It has been my joy to know eight of the twelve presidents and all five of the general secretaries of the Baptist World Alliance.

As stated in the preamble of the constitution, "The Baptist World Alliance, extending over every part of the world, exists in order more fully to show the essential oneness of Baptist people in the Lord Jesus Christ, to impart inspiration to the Brotherhood, and to promote the spirit of fellowship, service and cooperation among its members; but this Alliance may in no way interfere with the independence of the churches or assume the administrative functions of existing organizations."

As to the nature and functions of the Alliance the constitution states, "The Alliance shall:

- (1) Have as one of its primary purposes the safeguarding and maintenance of full religious liberty everywhere, not only for our own constituent churches, but also for all other religious faiths.
- (2) Serve as an agency for propagating Baptist principles and tenets of faith, objectives, and distinctive principles throughout the world.
- (3) Serve as an agency to make surveys throughout the world with a view to furnishing facts to the various Baptist groups and counseling with them in establishing work in new fields when such service is requested.
- (4) Serve as a worldwide agency in making such use of the radio and press as may be practicable in preaching the gospel, propagating Baptist principles, and promoting common tasks of Baptists throughout the world.
- (5) Arrange and conduct preaching missions throughout the world.
- (6) Cooperate with Baptist groups in instituting and administering relief funds as occasion may require.
- (7) Gather news by means of correspondents in the various Baptist groups and disseminate it by use of bulletins, Baptist and other papers, and radio; and, when feasible, by a Baptist world publication.

Some 8,100 messengers from 78 countries were registered at the Tokyo meeting.

The Alliance serves as:

1. An agency of communication between Baptists through publications, dissemination of news, film, radio, personal visits, and correspondence;
2. A forum for study and fraternal discussion of doctrines, practices, and ways of witnessing to the world;

3. A channel of cooperation in extending help to each other and those in need;
4. A vigilant force for safeguarding religious liberty and other God-given rights;
5. A sponsor of regional and worldwide gatherings for the furtherance of the gospel.

Baptists now live, work, and witness in 125 countries of the world. Their fellowship encompasses 31,023,937 baptized believers. Of this number 721,311 are in Africa, 1,122,860 are in Asia, 215,670 are in Central America, 1,178,042 are in Europe, 949 are in the Middle East — 7 nations, 389,555 are in South America, 145,412 are in the Southwest Pacific, and 27,250,138 are in North America.

A Baptist World Congress is a memorable event of lasting value to those who attend because it provides:

An offering in numerous tongues, of praise and thanksgiving to God for His grace and blessing upon us as followers of Christ in the world;

An occasion to meet with fellow-Baptists from all over the world, thereby strengthening our fellowship through personal knowledge of each other;

An opportunity to clarify our Baptist convictions and to prepare us to give an account of the hope that is in us;

An outpouring of compassion and channeling of aid to people in distress;

An orientation concerning the conditions in various parts of the world in regard to religious liberty and human rights;

An outlet for bearing witness for Christ to the world.

At the meeting of the Congress in Tokyo Dr. V. Carney Hargroves was elected to serve as president for the next five years. Dr. Hargroves, who is in his seventieth year, is a native of Virginia, a graduate of Southern Baptist Seminary, a former president of the American Baptist Convention, a former vice-president of the Baptist World Alliance, and is serving in his thirty-eighth year as pastor in Philadelphia.

The list of twelve vice-presidents includes ten ministers, one layman, and one woman — one from Africa, four from Asia, two from Europe, one from South America, and four from North America.

The theme of this Congress was "Reconciliation Through Christ." The keynote address, based on II Corinthians 5:18-20, was delivered by Dr. Theodore F. Adams, Pastor-Emeritus of the First Baptist Church, Richmond, Virginia, who is now serving as visiting professor of preaching, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina. In a world that is so torn with conflict, so diverse in interests, and so separated by ignorance and misunderstanding and prejudice it was certainly appropriate for us to consider the theme, "Reconciliation Through Christ." The message of "Reconciliation Through Christ" is one of harmony and understanding, a brotherhood in peace between God and man and between man and his fellowmen. As Christians we are "enlisted in the service of reconciliation." We are "ambassadors for Christ." We are to live and serve as those who have found reconciliation with God and seek reconciliation with men.

Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr., vice-president of Liberia, delivered the presidential address on the theme, "Let Us Go Forth," based on Hebrews 13:12-14, which says, "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." He stated that when he was inducted into office in 1965 that he adopted a seven-point program, namely:

1. To strive to demonstrate our essential oneness in Christ Jesus as Baptists.
2. To labor at broadening and making more extensive the glorious fellowship now happily existing in the Alliance.
3. To vigorously emphasize world Evangelism, and urge upon all of this great Baptist family to make a dynamic thrust in this direction.
4. To urge more study of the Bible as the revealed and infallible word of God.
5. To strive to develop a keen awareness of the dignity of the human person.
6. To emphasize the need for greater relief to areas of our world where victims unfortunately are suffering and in need and distressed.
7. To set the highest goal in our quest for peace in these days of tension, confusion, strife, violence, and conflict.

Dr. Tolbert stated that in attempting to execute this program, he had journeyed to thirty countries on six continents, traveled 212,420 air miles and 4,788 ground miles. In his message he challenged his hearers, who are facing the confronting problems of our day and the ever-increasing challenges of this age, to advance vigorously and courageously, never retreating or even remaining in a static position, faithfully demonstrating our love for God and for our fellowmen. He said, "Let us go forth unrelentingly with togetherness, consistency and tenacity of purpose, executing our objectives not in our own strength, but with the grace and the might of our omnipotent Lord and make our world better by enriching the lives of all men. May we, in the end of our course, find satisfaction and joy in the fulfillment of our individual mission to the betterment of our world and the glory of God."

The Congress Sermon was delivered by Dr. John W. Williams of Kansas City, Missouri, on the subject, "The Whole Gospel For The Whole World," based on Acts 10. He declared that when the whole gospel is preached to any people it would have great effect. If Christ is to be pleased every class and every nation must receive the whole gospel. Having been entrusted with the word of reconciliation, as ambassadors for Christ we are obligated to fulfill our task by faithfully proclaiming His gospel.

In the Manifesto On Freedom And Responsibility, which was adopted by the Congress, it was voted to adopt the following Christian mandate:

1. Because both freedom and responsibility are inherent in human nature and because both are explicit in the biblical revelation, Christians have a mandate to maintain the essential unity of these two, keeping them in careful balance.

2. Because every human being is of infinite worth, Christians have a mandate, in the face of dire threats to man's freedom and manifold pressures toward irresponsibility, to work in self-giving love for the good of all men.
3. Because the freedom "for which Christ has set us free" is inextricably allied with responsibility to Jesus Christ as Lord and to other men as brothers, Christians have a mandate to minister to their fellowmen.
4. Because no one is ever free to exploit, abuse, despise, ignore, or remain alienated from his fellowman, the Christian who has been reconciled to God has a mandate to be responsibly reconciled to his brother and to love not only God but also his neighbor as himself.
5. Because Baptists stand in a heritage that has fostered both responsibility under law and commitment to freedom for all men, we today acknowledge a special mandate to hold high the banners of both freedom and responsibility.