



Carter Speaks At Men's Rally

By Charlie Warren and Jim Newton

It was a moving, impressive program, featuring not only a challenge from the nation's most prominent Baptist layman, but the inspiration of music that sent chill bumps up the spines of many of the 8,000 Baptists gathered for the National Conference of Baptist Men in Atlanta's Omni Coliseum.

An unusual hush came over the crowd at the very beginning when the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra played the beautiful strains of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. People entered quietly, almost with the reverence they enter their churches on Sunday mornings.

The reverence was dramatically interrupted by pomp and ceremony as representatives from all 50 states, and 92 countries of the world where Baptists sponsor missions work, entered carrying flags of those states and nations.

Representatives of 40 ethnic groups with whom Southern Baptists work carried placards indicating their ethnic heritage.

As they marched to the front of the coliseum, the orchestra played "Stars and Stripes Forever."

A hush settled over the auditorium again, and necks careened in anticipation. Finally a voice boomed, "Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States." The orchestra played "Hail to the Chief" as President and Mrs. Jimmy Carter entered.

"God's will and my political duty... when I violate one I violate the other"

The president warmly hugged Glendon McCullough, executive director of the Brotherhood Commission which sponsored the rally as a part of the National Conference of Baptist Men.

Another high moment of inspiration came shortly after the president entered when Metropolitan Opera singer Irene Jordan and Grand Ole Opry singer Teddy Wilburn, both Baptist laypersons, sang a medley of hymns written by Baptists. Symbolic of the unity within diversity that characterizes the Southern Baptist Convention, the opera and opry singers concluded with a duet, "Bless Be the Tie that Binds."

Before he spoke, the president presented citations to Curtis Hickman, a Royal Ambassador from Dublin, N.C.; and to William White of Morrisville, N.C. Hickman represented boys who have earned more than 750 hours of service

in their churches and communities, and White represented volunteer laymen who have been involved in disaster relief work.

Earlier, a representative from each of 15 breakfast sessions held throughout downtown Atlanta for Baptist Men in various vocational groups brought brief reports on how laymen in their specific vocation were seeking to live out their faith through their work.

Dressed in a fire-engine red suit and ruffled shirt, Grand Ole Opry comedian Jerry Clower referred to the president, saying "Let's play for Brother Jimmy, I love a Bible readin' president."

A 500-voice choir of Baptist men from Southern Baptist churches, mainly from Georgia, sang "Rise Up O Men of God" just before President Carter addressed his fellow Baptists.

Coliseum Half Filled

As he sat on the front row of the platform listening to the music, President Carter looked out at the half-filled 16,000-seat coliseum.

Ticket sales for the conference had fallen far short of the 16,000 goal, and after only about 3,000 tickets had been sold the Brotherhood Commission opened up attendance to the rally to the general public at no charge. The \$12.50 tickets were to have covered the total cost of the vocational breakfasts plus the Bold Mission Rally.

In his opening remarks, President Carter quipped that perhaps if singer Anita Bryant had been invited, there might have been more success in filling the auditorium.

In his address, President Carter challenged fellow Southern Baptists to get involved in the issues of human rights, peace, freedom, nuclear arms proliferation and the sale of armaments, terrorism, rapidly expanding world population and world hunger.

"These are not just political problems," the president declared. "These are moral problems because they violate the very precepts of God in which we believe."

Demonstration Interrupts Speech

The president was interrupted a half-dozen times with applause, given a three-minute standing ovation at the end, and interrupted for several minutes by shouts from four hecklers, who identified themselves with the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade.

The demonstrators rose about five minutes into the president's address, chanting "From Palestine to Africa to Panama — U.S. Imperialists Out." They also unfurled a banner reading: "Down with U.S. and Soviet War Moves! From

President Carter at Baptist Men's Rally — Jimmy Carter and wife, Rosalynn, take their seats on the platform (above) as Glendon McCullough, executive director of the Brotherhood Commission, presides. Carter presents a citation to William White of Morrisville, N.C. (above left). White represented laymen who have served in volunteer disaster relief work. Metropolitan Opera singer Irene Jordan and Grand Ole Opry singer Teddy Wilburn (below), both Baptists, sang a medley of hymns written by Baptists.



Palestine to Africa to Panama — U.S. Imperialists Out! Support the Just Struggles of Peoples of the World."

All the time, the president continued his speech, hardly missing a word and ignoring the chants. A handful of Atlanta police quickly moved the demonstrators out of the coliseum.

Although the president commended the Southern Baptist Convention for earlier in the week adopting a "beautiful" statement on human rights, he drew applause when he declared that "passage of a resolution is not enough."

He challenged Baptists to "reach out in our community, nation, and around the world to destroy those elements of life which still interfere with the realization of those hopes and dreams of people who are afflicted and deprived."

He cautioned Americans against turning their backs on suffering people "as we did when millions of Jews lost their lives in the Holocaust."

No Church-State Conflict

The president said he never detected any conflict with "doing God's will and my political duty. It is obvious," added, "that when I violate one, at the same time I violate the other."

He challenged Baptists to become involved in the denomination's Bold Mission Thrust, and urged strong, aggressive leadership for the denomination's program seeking to proclaim the gospel to every person in the world by the year 2000.

He cautioned Baptist leaders, however, against being too timid. "Sometimes we are reluctant to deal with a complicated issue. Controversy scares us. There is no doubt in my mind that adopting a commitment for Bold Mission Thrust is fraught with difficulties and the prospect of failure, and no one likes to fail. . . . Sometimes

the best way to avoid failure is not to try very hard."

He challenged Baptists to be willing to take risks, to use their influence, wealth and power to deal with the moral issues that face the world.

"A nation without morality will soon lose its influence around the world," the president said.

He added that the character of American life has been tested by the Vietnam War, the Watergate disgraces, the revelations about the CIA, but "because our people had an inner strength, our country has not been fundamentally damaged, but . . . is now stronger than ever."

Similar Goals Cited

President Carter said the goals of the president, a denomination, and a country are remarkably similar: "a desire for peace, a need for humility, for examining one's faults and turning away from them; a commitment to human rights in the broadest sense . . . a concern with the alleviation of suffering because of deprivation or hatred or hunger or physical affliction, and a willingness to share one's ideals, one's faith, to translate love in a person to justice.

"A nation, like a person, has to continually be on an inward journey and an outward journey," he said. "The inward journey," he added, "provides peace derived from an inner strength, an awareness of the will of God, and a willingness to carry out this will. We cannot succeed without this," he concluded.

With those closing words, the Atlanta Symphony played the president's favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace," while the congregation joined in singing. The rally concluded with prayer led by William Hardy of Columbus, Miss., chairman of the Brotherhood Commission. (M)