

Book Reviews

THE POLITICAL ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE UNITED STATES

edited by Stephen D. Johnson and Joseph B. Tamney
Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986, 361 pages, \$28.00

and

THE FIRST LIBERTY, RELIGION AND THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC

by William Lee Miller
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986, 374 pages, \$24.95

*Reviewed by George W. Jones, Director of Religious Programs,
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana.*

Two incidents at the Atlanta Southern Baptist Convention brought into focus the division over politics in Southern Baptists' life. The reading of a letter from President Reagan was greeted by a protest from floor that it was inappropriate and offensive. Yet, doubtlessly many were ready to join the Commander-in-Chief's crusade to restore voluntary (teacher-led) prayers in public schools and to ban abortions. Also, the perennial attempt to disassociate the SBC from the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs revealed the depth of the opposition to how the BJCPA has led Baptists in national political matters.

These two books — the first a compendium by social scientists of several disciplines and the other a literate, articulate exposition of the social history of the constitutional provision for religious liberty — provide a helpful understanding of how people of faith do and should relate to American political life.

Tamney and Johnson, Ball State University sociologists, enlisted political scientists, historians and theologians as well as fellow sociologists in analyzing the current involvement of religious groups, both left and right, in the American political process. Miller, who received his Ph.D. in theological ethics from Yale and now heads the Department of Rhetoric and Commun-

ication Studies at the University of Virginia, had a deeper motive. By investigating the political philosophies and theological assumptions that went into the making of the First Amendment guaranteeing religious freedom, he hoped to enlist present-day Americans in greater support for the "common good, equality, order, justice, duties, responsibility—. . . the social context within which freedoms and rights find their place and ground" (p. 349). Tamney, *et al.*, ascertained what is happening as religious groups enter the political arena today, while Miller addressed what should happen given the particular philosophical context and historical background of American political life.

University of Louisville political scientist Paul Weber, in the opening chapter of Tamney, by analyzing Supreme Court decisions, tells us how religion and politics can legally mix without violating the separation of church and state. Editors Tamney and Johnson then report on their own studies of Muncie (Lynd's "Middletown") clergy. For example, they found that the more conservative clergy are more effective political advocates than their more liberal peers, probably because conservatives are more likely to use religious justifications for their positions. After all, aren't the laws of God, right and wrong, and knowing what's best for people the things that clergy are expected to be experts in? They also found that in "Middletown" the Christian Right is not just a religious phenomenon but that psychological, economic and educational factors also account for its rising strength.

As in most anthologies, some authors write better than others and mobilize their information more persuasively. In perhaps the best chapter of the book, Purdue sociologist James Madison answers the question, "Why don't local churches pursue a more just and equal society?" He finds the role of social elites in the churches, the subservience of the poor, the lack of training of clergy in leadership, the voluntary nature of American churches and the historic stress on personal salvation and faith all to be factors. Richard Pierard, Indiana State University historian, chronicles the growth of political action among evangelicals since 1920; while Merle Strege ferrets out the theological antecedents of the Moral Majority.

The current tangle of the Religious Left is illustrated by the lack of focus of this section of the book. The Roman Catholic bishops' peace and economic epistles, the jousting of Jews and Blacks in the Democratic Party in 1984 and the impact by

feminist theologians on feminist politics are the main strands considered.

Miller, on the other hand, keeps a steady aim on his target. He holds to the fine line between merely retelling or moralizing on the story of how Americans got into the frightening dilemma and, on the other hand, aggressively asserting his own pragmatic prescription.

In his analysis of what the Founding Fathers, principally James Madison, did in drawing upon Puritan, Enlightenment, and radical Reformation (Roger Williams was most influential) thought in inventing America, Miller finds most hope in their provision for religious liberty. "The historic high religions, the particular form of American secular social idealism can find within itself, partly as a result of deliberation with the others, the resources to contribute to a deeper community" (p. 351). (Miller's sentences are convoluted but his meaning is clear.) And, the most important moment in the process Miller identified was January 16, 1786, when Madison finally guided through the Virginia Assembly a statute on religious liberty. The way relationships between church and state had been sorted out in Virginia became the pattern for the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment, three years later.

In the process, Miller puts into perspective the contributions to religious liberty of Baptists such as Roger Williams, Isaac Backus and John Leland, as well as other colonial religious groups. His thorough analysis of the development of the religio-political aspect of culture, as it has progressed in America, marks this book as the authoritative treatment of the subject. More than a history of religious ideas or of institutions, it places these in the context of the current political issues of that day and thereby enlightens the conflicts which tear at the fabric of America today.

Turn to Miller, then, for the most definitive answers available from scholarship on such questions as, what were the beliefs and practices of the Founding Fathers? What allowed the Protestant crusades to make America Christian? What changes in the American society led the Supreme Court to begin examining, defining, and applying the First Amendment? Use the Tamney-Johnson book to understand what religious forces are doing in the political realm today.

Publishers of both books apparently priced them with the idea that only libraries and scholars would buy them. They are therefore expensive. You may want to wait until your library buys copies, but be sure that it does. Others will want to read them.

One other concern remains. Why should the Baptist campus minister be interested in how Baptists and other Christians affect public politics? The answer is two-fold: self-protection and stewardship. Since the presidency of Jimmy Carter thrust Southern Baptists to the center of public life in America, all of us have become involved. It has been evident in all national conventions since that there is now cooperation by all sorts of groups wanting a piece of the Christian vote. These forces have invaded Southern Baptist life under such guides as Biblical inerrancy or a relevant social issue.

Since attitudes about the role Christians should play in political life affect our self-identity and sense of mission, and since higher education is a very visible part of public life, religio-political attitudes affect how the jobs of persons involved in higher education are viewed and defined. Understanding what changes are taking place is the first step in taking charge and doing something.

Beyond self-interest, Baptist campus ministers have a responsibility for sharing with brothers and sisters outside higher education the knowledge and the new models for public life which academe generates. In this way the entire family of God can best deal with the realities of modern life rather than the dimly remembered past or fantasies of the future in projecting an effective witness for Christ. This is a part of what we owe to those who support us. The knowledge gained from our daily contact with academe can help us in being faithful in our choices regarding the public good.

**THE TRUTH IN CRISIS: THE CONTROVERSY
IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION**

by James C. Hefley

Dallas: Criterion Publications, 1986

Reviewed by Wayne I. Nicholson, Pastor, McCalla Avenue Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

Messengers to the stormy Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta this year were curious about this volume. After all, the Baptist Sunday School Board banned it from its exhibit and the author found himself in the awkward situation of selling the book outside the Georgia World Congress Center. Like many messengers, I wondered what might be in the book to prompt a brouhaha. When I returned home from Atlanta I ordered a copy for myself from — you guessed it — a Baptist Book Store. When it arrived I read the book in two days, finding it a compelling account of the trouble brewing in America's largest Protestant denomination.

Of course, anyone who purports to tell the story of our crisis will write from some perspective. James C. Hefley, a Southern Baptist journalist and author, writes an engaging account of the turmoil from a point of view that is slightly to the right. His perspective reflects that of most Southern Baptists, however, and in no way affects the accuracy or legitimacy of the book.

In my judgment every campus minister in the SBC should read this book for three reasons. In the first place, it is a remarkably fascinating and informative narrative of why and how the so-called "takeover" of the SBC began. Hefley provides the background and reports the consequences through the seven successful years of that effort. He provides the reader with interesting vignettes of the leading personalities and issues involved.

For example, in his chapter, "How the Conservatives Came to Power," Hefley reports on the dither in the First Baptist Church, Atlanta, as Charles Stanley assumed the pastorate in the early 1970s. The reader is left to wonder if the subsequent tenuous relations between Stanley and Russell Dilday (president of Southwestern Seminary) may not be traced back to this time when 36 deacons and a host of others left First Baptist, Atlanta, to join Second Ponce de Leon where Dilday was pastor. Inter-

estingly, it was in First Baptist Church, Atlanta, that the conservatives met who would organize the Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship and publish *The Southern Baptist Journal*, edited by William Powell.

The reader will learn also of the reaction of certain moderate leaders to head off the "rising star out of Memphis," notably Adrian Rogers (pastor, Bellevue Baptist, Memphis), by nominating James Sullivan (president of the Sunday School Board) for president in 1976. The effort was strengthened the following year by the plan to nominate Jimmy Allen (pastor, First Baptist, San Antonio) for president. Meanwhile Judge Paul Pressler had met a young theologian of New Orleans Seminary, by the name of Paige Patterson, at the Cafe du Monde, which led to the formation of the conservative coalition.

The reader of this volume quickly surmises that there is more to the denominational strife than meets the eye. It is a woeful story of personality conflict, petty jealousy, arrogant leadership and political subterfuge. At any rate, in a matter of three years, blatant and organized political efforts to control the SBC began in earnest. Every denominational worker should be informed of these events.

In the second place, this book should be read because a campus minister deals with students from diverse backgrounds. Students come from rural and urban areas, as well as conservative and moderate churches. Familiarity with the people and issues involved should help the minister respond to student questions with fairness and objectivity. Hefley's volume is reportorial rather than judgmental, although the reader will flinch at developments on both sides. One gets the feeling that what is going on is a grim spectacle indeed. Declarations of "holy war" and charges of "denominational fascism" (see page 108) are harsh and unseemly. The campus minister who reads this book will quickly conclude that no one is without sin.

Moreover, the campus minister who has this volume will benefit by loaning it to students who would like to read for themselves about what is happening in the SBC. Hefley allows the reader to draw his/her own conclusions regarding the conflict.

Finally, I have found campus ministers to be creative people — sensitive, astute, positive and helpful. It is the last chapter

in the book that disturbs me. Hefley undertakes the task of offering three possible scenarios: a) the conservatives will continue to win and control every agency board, b) the moderates will turn back the conservative challenge, and c) there will be a see-saw power struggle for the foreseeable future. In all three situations Hefley foresees disastrous consequences and I concur. Perhaps campus ministers, after reading the book and musing on our crisis, may offer creative initiatives to heal the wound that is destroying us.

LEARNING TO LEAD: BRINGING OUT THE BEST IN PEOPLE

by Fred Smith

Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1986, 182 pages

*Reviewed by Robert L. Hall, Director, Baptist Student Union,
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee.*

Fred Smith, a successful businessman, consultant, and public speaker has written this the fifth volume in The Leadership Library of Word Publishers. Although the book is written for pastors, all of its concepts are easily transferred to student ministry situations.

Smith begins with an interesting section on the personal issues of leadership. He points out that there is a difference between being a boss and being a leader. A leader has "the ability to turn subordinates into followers" (p. 23). "Leaders get out in front and stay there by raising the standards by which they judge themselves — and by which they are willing to be judged" (p. 12). Smith contends, quite correctly, that leadership is a function and not a title.

The rest of the book deals with the areas where leadership and administration overlap — directing yourself, guiding your co-workers, and leading your clientele groups.

The most interesting chapter dealt with the personal disciplines to which leaders must submit themselves. I especially appreciated his discussion of the issue of freedom. Few BSU directors are free to serve Christ alone; most have to balance their freedom with the constraints of denomination and associa-

tion. Smith takes a pragmatic view of this issue: "One of the first requirements of a leader is to stay a part of the community he's leading" (p. 50). He helps us recognize the difference between the "short-term and long-term victory" (p. 50). This section is tied together with interesting examples, informed observations, and some helpful illustrations.

I felt the final chapters of the book to be less than appealing. They are marked by a rather low-level understanding of management theory. A case in point is the criteria Smith uses in hiring people. He feels that the best way to hire an employee is to take a trip with him. In particular, Mr. Smith learns most about a person by watching him or her drive (p. 100). His thesis is that if a person drives with the flow of traffic, then he will also be a good long-range planner. If one avoids hitting potholes in the road, then the office's Xerox machine will receive good treatment, and so on. I know some BSU directors who would never get a job were one's driving style the fundamental issue in making hiring decisions. The pressurized environment of a job interview hardly lends itself to normative behavior. Some of the book's suggestions, although practical in intent, miss the better part of wisdom.

Mr. Smith also has the annoying habit of name-dropping in his narrative style. There were a few too many phrases like the following to suit my sensibilities: "Senator S. I. Hayakawa . . . (and I) spent a pleasant evening discussing" (p. 121), and "John Stein, the great impresario, told me" (p. 144).

Learning to lead is a crucial skill for campus ministers. This was generally a helpful volume, although I would not place it at the top of my reading list. He raises a number of important issues to student work. Our fundamental programmatic problems are most often related to leadership. The reviewer considers this book to be more helpful than destructive; however, one should use a cautious eye in viewing some of the author's conclusions and suggestions for action.