
BOOK REVIEWS

BAPTIST POLITY: AS I SEE IT

by James L. Sullivan

Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1983, 240 pages, \$8.95

*Reviewed by Ircel Harrison, associate, Student Department,
Tennessee Baptist Convention, Brentwood*

James L. Sullivan has been active in a Southern Baptist church since he was a Sunbeam at "Sullivan's Holler" in Mississippi. He was a pastor for thirty-one years, served as president of the Baptist Sunday School Board for twenty-two years, and president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1977. He is certainly no newcomer to denominational life, polity, or politics.

Sullivan's purposes for the book are two-fold: first, to explain how Baptists have historically worked together for common goals; second, to give his understanding and impressions of how Southern Baptists can and should work together. He writes from the perspective of an active participant and "insider" in Southern Baptist life.

As one might expect, Sullivan begins with the nature and importance of the local church. He follows this with a brief historical survey of forces which have shaped Southern Baptist polity, then a list of commonly held misunderstandings about our polity (a very informative chapter).

Chapter five deals with organizational structures developed by Christian denominations, then chapter six explains how organized Southern Baptist life emerged.

Other chapters cover the present organizational structure of the denomination (boards, agencies, etc.), how an annual convention is conducted, the nature of the trustee system, and the financing of the entire operation.

Two of the most interesting chapters are the one dealing with the theological position of Southern Baptists relative to other Christian bodies in America and the chapter on areas of polity and organization which require constant attention and improvement.

All of this is tied together with interesting examples, informed observations, and some helpful illustrations.

While it is not possible to do justice to the book in this brief review, we can consider three crucial questions with which Sullivan deals throughout the work. First, what is the purpose of the Southern Baptist Convention? The convention, undergirded by the precepts of the priesthood of the believer and local church autonomy, was created for action rather than doctrinal unity (p. 43). "As necessary as doctrine is, it was not the original basis of our cooperation as a denomination" (p. 174). Missions and ministry were the motivation for the formation of the convention. The first charter of the convention states that it was "created for the purpose of eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of christians (sic), for the propogation of the gospel . . ." (p. 240).

Second, how should we work together as a convention? According to Sullivan, "under no condition should . . . (there) ever be a 'stacked committee' for the purpose of producing a certain type of action!" (p. 120). In the same way, trustees should not be preprogrammed. "To try to commit trustees in advance of election to certain persons or ideas is un-Baptistic historically" (p. 221). Qualified, trustworthy trustees are the key to the proper functioning of any Southern Baptist institution. Sullivan states, "Contributions are not for coercion or control. Trustees are for that. Contributions are for support" (p. 218). Of course, for the convention's machinery to operate properly, "the trust level must be very high" (p. 111).

Third, who are we as Southern Baptists? Sullivan believes that "we are not liberals, but we are not Fundamentalists either" (p. 208). We tend to be more conservative theologically and socially than many denominations, but we are "inherently progressive in . . . methodology" (p. 203). He writes, "It is highly unlikely that there are any 'real liberals' in the Southern Baptist Convention" (p. 199). He observes that Jesus was much more critical of the Pharisees (the "literalists" of his day) than he was of the Sadducees (so liberal that they denied the Resurrection). "He saw more danger in the ultraconservative spirit and attitude than he did in some of the more liberal theological viewpoints of his day" (p. 199).

Although Sullivan does not single out any individual or movement, he is clearly disturbed by present challenges to the

way we have traditionally done things. Recent events would compound his concern. The convention in Dallas certainly raised questions about whether we will be able to continue functioning as we have in the past: Is doctrinal unity more important than unity in missions? Can there be a "democratic" meeting of 45,000 people? Can the present structure survive a "party" approach grounded in distrust? Will one have to align with one party or the other in order to have a voice in the convention? Will Sullivan's book soon be of historical rather than practical value? Stay tuned to Atlanta for further developments.

What is the value of this book to campus ministers? First, it is an important *educational resource for ourselves and our students. We must understand some of the basic principles explained here and help college students understand what it means to be Baptist. No matter what happens in the future, here is a benchmark by which to measure change and evaluate challenges.*

Second, it speaks to our relational life. Most of us work as employees of boards and conventions. We are stewards of Cooperative Program funds. This book will help us to understand the context within which we function daily and the relationships involved. It provides perspective for us.

Third, it speaks to us on the *management* level. The structures in which we work are not democracies. They have been given clear mandates and limitations by the churches and conventions through their charters. We function within those frameworks by our own choice.

Fourth, it clarifies our *political* agenda. If we wish to accomplish change, we must do so by working through the boards and committees to which we are accountable.

James Sullivan has done us a service by explaining who we are and how we have traditionally worked together as Southern Baptists. He helps us to understand our strengths and our weaknesses. We should take advantage of his insights and share them with others.

MONEY, SEX AND POWER

by Richard Foster

San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985, 248 pp., \$13.95

*Reviewed by Robert B. Ford, Jr., Baptist Campus Minister
at Jacksonville State University, Jacksonville, Alabama*

This is Richard Foster's third volume. It should approach the popularity of his well-known *Celebration of Discipline*. For easy readability the book is divided into three sections—money, sex, power. Any one of the three might be taken alone, as an admirable treatment of the Christian perspective on its subject. Yet the three also are connected well so that the reader may see the importance of the “big three” in the life of the Christian.

In the introduction, Foster sets the stage by telling the reader:

The crying need today is for people of faith to live faithfully. This is true in all spheres of human existence, but is particularly true with reference to money, sex and power. . . . No three things have been more sought after or are more in need of a Christian response (p. 1).

In the opinion of this reviewer, Dr. Foster does an outstanding job of proposing this response.

After surveying what he calls “the historic vows” of money, sex and power, Foster moves on to **Part I: Money**. He treats this subject in 4 chapters: “The Dark Side of Money”; “The Light Side of Money”; “Kingdom Use of Unrighteous Mammon”; “The Vow of Simplicity.” Foster defines the dark side of money as “both . . . the way money can be a threat to our relationship with God and the radical criticism of wealth that we find so much in Jesus’ words” (pp. 20-21). Of the light side, he states, “I am referring to the way in which money can be used to enhance our relationship with God and bless mankind.” In “Kingdom Use” Foster examines passages from Luke 16 and Matthew 6, then goes on to make extensive pragmatic applications of the subject. “The Vow of Simplicity” harks back to *Celebration of Discipline*, but gives more detailed insights into simplicity of lifestyle in relation to money.

Part II: Sex consists of 80 pages which this reviewer wishes he could require every student under his leadership to read. It is quickly obvious that Foster has not written for popularity, but for the sake of the Christian understanding of this topic. The divisions of this section are “Sexuality and Spirituality,”

“Sexuality and Singleness,” “Sexuality and Marriage,” and “The Vow of Fidelity.”

Foster’s thesis for this section is:

One of the real tragedies in Christian history has been the divorce of sexuality from spirituality. This fact is all the more lamentable since the Bible holds such a high celebrative view of human sexuality (p. 91).

The first chapter of this section lays a good foundation for the understanding of “sexuality and spirituality.” Of particular importance are the sections on “distorted sexuality” and “homosexuality and the Christian.”

Since “singles” are a great focus of the church’s ministry today, Foster’s chapter on “sexuality and singleness” assumes great importance. He should be heard as he incisively states

The church can make an enormous contribution by helping singles grapple with their sexuality with honesty and integrity. But in order to do this we must stop thinking of single persons as somehow devoid of sexual needs. Singles—especially those with a serious Christian commitment—really struggle with their sexuality (p. 114).

In this chapter, Dr. Foster dares to deal openly with such taboos as “sexual fantasy” and “masturbation.” He ends with celebrative definition of the single life.

The chapter on “sexuality and marriage” is important for its discussion of “marriage covenantal character,” “Christ and divorce,” and “Christ and re-marriage.” Dr. Foster concludes his discussion of sexuality with an excellent call to fidelity. In this chapter he gives a clear, seven-part definition of fidelity. His view is summed up in the statement

Always remember, fidelity is not a static set of regulations; it is a vibrant, living adventure. It is not so much a way to suppress lust as a way to orient our lives toward a unifying goal (p. 171).

Of special interest to those presently embroiled in certain ecclesiastical struggles will be **Part III: Power**. Here Foster deals with “Destructive Power,” “Creative Power,” “The Ministry of Power” and “The Vow of Service.” The stage is set for this discussion by the statement that

power profoundly impacts our interpersonal relationships, our social relationships, and our relationship with God. Nothing touches us more for good or ill than power (p. 175).

If there is a section of this book which is more difficult to assess and accept than others, it is in Dr. Foster's attempt to correlate destructive power with Paul's "principalities and powers." Still, even in this section he provides food for thought. As a balance, Dr. Foster does an excellent job "naming the powers." The reader will be uncomfortable as these powers are recognized from daily experience. It is also an excellent conclusion to the section on power to call the reader to "the vow of service." The chapter is concluded with a story from Henri Nouwen, leading their reader to see that "we serve — always remembering that we do not serve some nameless, faceless, humanity, but 'that solitary individual' " (p. 245).

Foster's conclusion is that "the vow of service means to see that solitary individual. This is the way of Christ. This is the path of obedience" (p. 246).

With a brief "Epilogue: Living the Vows," Richard Foster concludes this important volume. The reviewer gladly recommends it to every thoughtful disciple.

THE WORLD AT YOUR DOORSTEP: A HANDBOOK FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MINISTRY

by Lawson Lau

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1984, 144 pages, \$5.95

Reviewed by Barry W. Vincent

Campus Minister, Special Ministries, Nashville, Tennessee

Lawson Lau has given us a very useful tool for ministry to international students. The real strength of the book is that it is written from the perspective of an international student. Lau, at the time of this writing, was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Illinois. He first came to the U.S. as an undergraduate student at Wheaton. His wife has also been a student and, since they arrived in this country, they have become parents. They have lived through many of the typical transitions, struggles and crises faced daily by international students on our campus.

Lau discusses the two extremes international students may go through in coping with culture shock, rejecting and criticizing all things American on the one hand or "going native" on the other. Campus ministers would do well to pay particularly close attention to the symptoms of international students who are "going native" by praising, adopting and immersing themselves

in everything American and forming quick and unusually close relationships with Americans. This can look very much like a BSU success story in international student ministry but have serious consequences for the international later on. Lau makes a helpful distinction between “going native” and healthy identification with the new culture.

Chapter Three on “Overcoming Cultural Barriers” gives some groundrules for effective cross-cultural communication. His very basic approach will be a good introduction for newcomers to international student ministry and a helpful refresher course for those with experience. Lau does not try to write a textbook in cultural anthropology. His approach is anecdotal. He is specifically and unapologetically evangelical in his language and methodologies.

In Chapters Five and Six and Appendix A, he gives helpful guidance for sharing the Christian faith with international students. Appendix A supplies a Biblical basis for this ministry that would have been more helpfully incorporated into the body of the book. Nevertheless, it is there in a concise, usable form.

There is an excellent discussion concerning the involvement of Christian faculty members including the reasons why faculty are particularly effective in outreach to international students.

A good addition to this book would have been some guidance on relating to university officials. This is the sticking point for many church and campus ministry programs in their efforts to establish relationships with internationals.

There are two practical uses that campus ministers will have for this book. It is a resource to place in the hands of a student who is interested in ministry to internationals, particularly a new international student chairperson on a BSU executive council, and it is a good book to suggest for church libraries.