

**A Century of Change**  
By Dr. Don Y. Gordon  
Pastor, First Baptist Church, Mt. Olive

At the beginning of the 20th century, North Carolina was one of the nation's poorest states — an economic and educational backwater with 1.8 million people that often depended on the charity of Yankee philanthropists. By the end of the century, North Carolina, now home to 7.3 million people, has not only elbowed its way into the nation's mainstream, but has become a leader in banking, high-tech research, tobacco, textiles, furniture, education and, of course, college basketball. North Carolina is a much different state at the end of the century than it was at the beginning. And Baptists, who were the largest religious group in 1900 and continue to be in 1999, have had a remarkable influence on the state's pathway away from ignorance and isolation.

**1900-1909**

The early 1900s provided leaders with a vision of the "Dawn of a New Day." People were leaving the farms and flooding into the cities and towns to work in mills and factories recently built. Charlotte surpassed Wilmington in 1901 as the state's largest city largely due to the construction of 13 textile mills in the Queen City. In 1903, the state's first child labor law was enacted stipulating that children under 12 could not work in factories and those under the age of 18 could not work more than 66 hours a week. Two grown boys captured the headlines for the decade: Wilbur and Orville Wright flew the first power-driven airplane in Kitty Hawk on Dec. 17, 1903. It became a symbol that would characterize this first decade of the century as moving beyond papa's backyard. Five years later, North Carolina was the vanguard in the Prohibition movement when its residents voted in a statewide referendum to prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Baptists were also active growing beyond malaise of recent decades. During this decade, the number of churches grew from 1,668 to 1,899. Sunday School enrollment increased almost 60 percent and total missions gifts rose a whopping 250 percent. State missionaries spread across the state planting churches and improving or starting new academies (private schools for children). Boiling Springs Academy, founded in 1905, was just one of the many schools Baptists founded and supported to meet the educational needs of children. President Taylor of Wake Forest College, in speaking of this academy movement, said "it was one of the marvels of North Carolina Baptist history ... in fifty years."

Needless to say, Baptists were actively involved in the temperance

movement. A Committee on Temperance was organized in 1901 and, later, J.W. Bailey, the editor of the Biblical Recorder became the president of the Anti-Saloon League of North Carolina, a statewide lobbying group. This movement eventually led to the ratification of the 18th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages in 1919.

### **1910-1919**

In June 1914, in the small mountain town of Sarajevo, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was assassinated. This seemingly local event led to the first World War and decimated humankind's idealistic belief that the world was becoming more like Christ's kingdom. North Carolina sent 86,457 men to the war, 20,350 of whom were black. Ft. Bragg was established as a field artillery training center for Americans sent to the foxholes in Europe. Other significant events of this decade were the creation of Mount Mitchell as the first state park and the ratification of the 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, providing for the popular election of U.S. Senators. Baptists continued their growth spurt, increasing in numbers. The Recorder Building was constructed in Raleigh 1911, giving a central location to many Convention activities. About 75 ministerial students were attending Wake Forest College and another 28 were at Southern Seminary. A number of constitutional changes were made at the convention, most notably a change in the election process of the trustees of the state Baptist institutions. This change marked a move away from self-perpetuating boards to ones that were more accountable to the convention body.

The biggest event of the decade, however, was the effort of N.C. Baptists to raise \$1 million dollars for all Convention causes. Almost simultaneously, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) started a similar \$75 million campaign and asked North Carolina to raise \$6 million. These fundraising plans were merged and North Carolina collected more than \$5 million in five years, a sum greater than Baptists had given in the previous 90 years of Convention work.

### **1920-1929**

The Roaring Twenties took on a feminist tone upon the Aug. 26, 1920, ratification of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. The first commercial radio broadcast in the state was made in 1921 by WBT in Charlotte. Talking movies arrived in the state in 1927 and Camels became the cigarette of choice for 40 percent of smokers who loved its unique domestic and foreign blend. Textiles joined tobacco as king of the state when, in 1923, North Carolina surpassed Massachusetts as the nation's top producer of textiles. The stock market crashed in 1929, bringing an end to the roar of the 20s, while the Scope's Monkey trial in 1925 began a

controversy about evolution and the interpretation of Genesis that continues to this day.

The \$75 million campaign of the SBC and the introduction of the Cooperative Program highlighted this decade for N.C. Baptists. The Cooperative Program was a plan startling in simplicity, yet revolutionary in impact. Under it, the state Convention would receive undesignated funds from its churches, then forward a certain percentage to the SBC. The Woman's Missionary Union (WMU) led the way in the campaign, raising over \$1.2 million in five years. In 1926, the state Convention was reorganized, and all of its boards consolidated into one "general board." Changes were taking place among the academies and colleges during the 1920s, as well. Meredith College moved from downtown Raleigh to its present campus of 120 acres on Hillsborough Street in west Raleigh, while Buies Creek Academy became Campbell College and an institution of the state convention for a cost of about \$28,000. Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem was opened to patients on May 28, 1923, establishing a healing ministry for many in need.

### **1930-1939**

The decade of the 30s began with the collapse of the stock market and ended with Adolph Hitler blitzkrieging across Europe, threatening the civil existence of the Western world. The Depression was evidenced in North Carolina by a drop in cotton prices from 30 cents a pound in 1929 to 6.5 cents a pound by 1932. Similar price drops occurred in most industries. Suffering was widespread with one medical report showing that of 144,000 school children examined in 41 counties, 23,000 were suffering from malnutrition.

The government took a larger role in many sectors of society: public school terms were extended in 1933 to eight months, limitations of hours of labor were established in 1937, and, in that same year, old-age pensions and unemployment insurance were started. Ironically, it was World War II that forced the United States out of the Depression through heavy demands of war machinery.

Like throughout most of the nation, N.C. Baptists found themselves struggling to pay off major debts. The success of the \$75 million campaign had led to financial overstepping, and the remainder of the 1930s and early 1940s were spent handling this fiscal crisis. Of the 44 N.C. missionaries on the foreign field in 1935, 31 were serving in China; another six were in Japan or Manchuria. Also in 1935, a Laymen's Convention Committee was formed which led to the creation of the Baptist Men's Convention Committee to promote spiritual nurture for male clergy and laity throughout

the state. Baptists went on record several times throughout the decade in opposition to establishment of liquor stores upon the end of statewide prohibition in 1935. WMU celebrated its 50th anniversary in the nation and the state. Also in 1935, the Convention adopted a non-aggression resolution about the war, calling on Congress to engage in defensive actions only. Chowan College became a junior college in 1937. The Minister's and Church Employees Retirement Plan was inaugurated in 1939, creating a financial safety net for retired ministerial staff.

### **1940-1949**

Dec. 7, 1941, was, as President Franklin D. Roosevelt described it, a day that would live in infamy, as the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, compelling the sleeping giant of America to join World War II. In North Carolina, military bases at Seymour-Johnson, Cherry Point, Camp Lejeune and Fort Bragg provided training for American troops. In 1946, after the Allied victory, the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation made a bequest to Wake Forest College and plans were made to move the school from Wake Forest, outside Raleigh, to Winston-Salem. On Jan. 1, 1946, 7,700 babies were born in the United States and began what became known as the Baby Boomers. Eventually, 76 million people would comprise this generation and change the way the nation thought, spoke and, most importantly, spent money.

The influx of returning American military personnel at the end of the war, and the accompanying elation, contributed to the greatest growth among N.C. Baptists in the state's history. A staggering 350 percent increase in missions giving for the decade was the most telling evidence. Baptisms increased by 50 percent during this same period. Boiling Springs Junior College was renamed Gardner-Webb College on June 6, 1943, and was accredited five years later, in 1948, by SACS.

During the 1944 annual meeting, the last canceled notes of the early 1930s were burned and the Convention breathed much easier. Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute in Hendersonville came into being in 1946, providing training for pastors with limited education. In 1949, Baptists purchased 248 acres of prime beach property at Fort Caswell to be used for retreats and summer campers.

### **1950-1959**

The Cold War began to chill the world's atmosphere following the negotiated truce with Korea in 1953. Communists were thought to be hiding in the halls of Congress and Hollywood, Calif. America was also entering the tortuous, but necessary, path of desegregation. The U.S. Supreme Court, in the landmark case *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, ordered all public

schools to be integrated "with all deliberate speed." Five years later, a few blacks were admitted to formerly all-white public schools.

A storm named Hazel rampaged across the state in 1954 causing the most natural destruction to that point. And, a fellow named Billy Haley, along with some "Comets," released a song that has had longer lasting effects than Hazel: "Rock Around the Clock."

The 50s witnessed the consolidation and growth of all the state Convention's institutions: seven colleges, one hospital, two orphanages, two homes for the aging and a foundation. Financial giving doubled during this decade; membership grew by 300,000, although baptisms decreased. Construction began in 1951 in Winston-Salem for the new Wake Forest College campus, with the college moving to its tobacco-endowed facilities in 1956.

Moving into the old campus in Wake Forest was Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, the fourth seminary founded by the SBC. "Night circles" were started by the WMU in 1957 so that working moms could learn and pray about missions. That same year, the WMU turned over the leadership of the Royal Ambassadors (boys' missions program) to the Brotherhood after having nurtured it for 49 years.

While most institutions were prospering in the 50s, the Convention made little progress in race relations. Though a resolution was adopted by the convention in 1955 asking all institutions to open their doors to minority groups, few churches had minority visitors, much less members.

### **1960-1969**

The 60s was a decade of turbulent change in North Carolina as it was around the nation. On Feb. 1, 1960, four black students staged a "sit-in" at the Woolworth's counter in Greensboro to protest segregated public facilities. In 1962, Judge Susie Sharp became the first woman to serve on the state Supreme Court. Cigarettes were taxed in 1969 for the first time in history after being labeled five years earlier, in 1964, as a "significant health hazard" by the Surgeon General. The minimum wage law was enacted in 1965, the same year that IBM showed up in the Research Triangle Park, ultimately becoming its largest and most notable tenant. And "brown-bagging" was legalized in 1967, permitting alcoholic beverages to be consumed in restaurants.

N.C. Baptists were affected by all these changes. Rarely mentioned is the fact that a N.C. Baptist church ordained the first female minister in the history of the SBC. Addie Davis was ordained Aug. 9, 1964, by Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham. This was incredible for a state that did not ratify the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote

until seven years later, in 1971. Also in 1964, the first-ever joint meeting was held between a predominantly black and white denomination cooperating with the SBC. That same year, the state Convention began meeting with the General Baptist State Convention of North Carolina. Meanwhile, in 1962 N.C. Baptists purchased 1,047 acres of forest land near Asheboro for a boys camp, and added a girls camp on nearby property seven years later. The Baptist Children's Homes also expanded its facilities during the 1960s, adding homes in Pembroke, Chapel Hill and Waynesville, and a refuge for unwed mothers in Asheville.

### **1970-1979**

While many young men were fleeing to Canada to avoid military duty in Vietnam, eastern North Carolina supplied the highest percentage of volunteers to the war. This was an uncommon phenomenon in a sea of change that included busing used as a tool for integration in Charlotte, the population of the state exceeding 5 million for the first time, and Jim Holshouser becoming the first Republican governor of the state in the 20th Century. The state General Assembly declined to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, the Communists and Ku Klux Klan fatally clashed in Greensboro, and employment in the state's textile mills reached an all-time peak at 293,600 jobs.

Bold Mission Thrust was launched in the SBC during the 1970s, providing inspiration to record missions giving and appointments to the mission field. Mission dollars grew by almost 300 percent during the decade, while membership moved upward by 100,000; and in 1979, baptisms peaked at 32,000. In 1979, the Convention's 135-year-old relationship with Wake Forest University changed, giving the school more control over its board of trustees and less financial support from the Convention. The event, however, that sent more ripples through N.C. Baptist ponds than any other was the SBC meeting of 1979 in Houston. There, the first-ballot election of Adrian Rogers as president of the SBC came amid allegations of overt political activity and signaled the start of "The Controversy." Whether one called it the "conservative resurgence" or "fundamentalist takeover," the issue of biblical inerrancy became the political rallying cry for rest of the century.

### **1980-1989**

The "Reagan revolution" of 1980 brought conservatism back into the mainstream and helped re-elect Republican governor Holshouser for a second term in 1988. Tobacco was losing ground and clout as the Liggett Group was ordered to pay a New Jersey man compensatory damages for contributing to his wife's death caused by cancer. It was the first of many lawsuits against the tobacco industry. Meanwhile, blacks were gaining

political ground as evidenced in the election of the first black, Henry Frye, to the state Supreme Court, and the adoption of the Martin Luther King holiday by the state General Assembly. The legal drinking age was raised from 18 to 19 in 1985, and, one year later, the Charlotte Hornets became the first major league professional sports team to locate in the state.

N.C. Baptists continued to give more to missions in the 1980s, an almost 100 percent increase, although the number of churches, membership and baptisms showed only a small increase.

The national conservative controversy spilled into the village of Wake Forest in 1987 as the Southeastern Seminary's trustees - now controlled by the fundamental-conservatives - enacted major changes. Seminary President Randall Lolley and four vice presidents resigned their positions in protest to the new directives.

While conflict hovered over the SBC, N.C. Baptists initiated lay-led, hands-on mission partnerships with other states and nations. The first partnership began in 1981 with West Virginia. That same year, Baptist Student Union college students began a partnership with Togo in Africa, a step which was co-opted by the state Convention in 1984. Teams of N.C. workers traveled to Africa to plant churches, offer medical services and build facilities for worship and discipleship.

### **1990-1999**

The 1998 impeachment of the President of the United States by the House of Representatives mattered less to North Carolinians than the floods caused by Hurricane Floyd, it seems. Much of the eastern part of the state was decimated in 1999 by rains that killed thousands of livestock, ruined crops and forced entire communities into homelessness. Estimates of the damage approached \$4 billion, the worst storm in the state's history.

Two more professional sports franchises arrived - one in Charlotte and another in Raleigh - and seemed to highlight the growing gap between the wealth of the state's metropolitan regions and the relative poverty of its rural areas. Banking, high-tech industries and tourism grew in prominence, just as textiles and tobacco were losing the same.

In Baptist life, the 90s has been marked by determined efforts to maintain unity in the midst of stressed diversity by providing choices. The state Convention budget has ceased being one simple "Cooperative Program" and now provides giving options in a "Cooperative Missions Giving" plan. By the end of the decade, a church or individual could channel missions dollars through four different plans. Likewise, the creation of five institutions of theological education is providing ministerial candidates with a host of choices: Campbell, Gardner-Webb, Wake Forest, "Baptist House"

at Duke University, and Baptist Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va. Choices have been increasingly provided at the local church level as multiple worship services have been offered using different worship styles to appeal to a broader range of preferences. The Shared Leadership Proposal of the state Convention - an attempt to provide a structure for electing a balanced slate of officers for the Convention and General Board - failed to receive the necessary two-thirds vote for adoption in the 1999 annual meeting. The support the proposal did receive from a majority of the messengers provided a ray of hope to many who believe consensus is still possible.

### **Conclusion**

As we approach the dawn of the third millennium, no one can say with certainty what God will do with and through N.C. Baptists. Will a new coalition occur bringing together different factions in a new confluence of spiritual vitality? Will controversy fragment the Convention into smaller groups competing for the hearts of N.C. Baptists? Will Baptists' emergence as the dominant religious group in the state desensitize them to the plight of the religious minorities of the day? Will God bring judgment on Baptists for some explicit or implicit support of evil, so that a mighty fall will take place? Or are Baptists at the forefront of a new bull market of personal piety, social justice, evangelical revival and corporate strength?

If the Lord should tarry and give us more time on this earth for His work, there is little doubt a great call will be placed upon N.C. Baptists. An unprecedented opportunity stands before this body of Christian disciples, called and nurtured in a land flowing with economic honey and spiritual hunger. In the words of Thomas Meredith which were uttered in the year 1830 at the inauguration of the first N.C. Baptist Convention:  
"Men and brethren, who live in the brightest day the world has ever seen, who are permitted to witness events which would have dazzled the vision and startled the faith of prophets and apostles - who are favored with opportunities which no preceding generation was ever permitted to enjoy. . . ; consider, we beseech you, who and where you are."