

Commentary for 2/2 by Denton Lotz: We belong together, because we belong to Christ!_12604

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COMMENTARY:

"We belong together, because we belong to Christ!"

By Denton Lotz

Sunday, Feb. 1, is Baptist World Alliance Day of Prayer, when Baptists all over the world remember they are one in Jesus Christ.

Almost 100 years ago—July 17, 1905—in London, England, Southern Baptist and British Baptist leaders met and together with many others from around the world formed the Baptist World Alliance. Next year, we expect that thousands upon thousands of Baptists from around the world will gather in Birmingham, England (July 27-31, 2005) to celebrate the Baptist World Alliance centennial. All Baptists are invited to this BWA birthday celebration.

With the proposed withdrawal of the Southern Baptist Convention from the BWA, many are wondering what kind of celebration it will be! It will be a joyous time, a wonderful time of fellowship, praise and inspiration under

the theme "Jesus Christ Living Water!" You are invited to join with brothers and sisters from around the world to celebrate the unity we have in Christ! That's why the theme for the centennial has been "Together in Christ 1905-2005." In a time when the world is separated by terrorism, ideological conflict and national and sectarian movements, as Baptist Christians we must be a model of that unity for which Christ prayed. You are a part of the BWA. Plan to attend the world congress in 2005! You are all welcome!

When Baptists first came together in 1905 to form the BWA, they were aware of the Apostle Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." The theme of so much of the Pauline epistle is a call for unity. Romans 12:16 commends, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; never be conceited." Philippians 2:1-2. appeals to us all, "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind." That is what the BWA is all about:

Together in Christ in evangelism.

I have just come from Cuba, and what a joy to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit, creating new house churches across the country. Since 1995, there has been an increase to 2,500 house churches, in addition to 2,000 churches and missions. Together in Christ, Baptists are witnessing in a wonderful way to Christ's perfect gift of salvation! What a joy to see thousands of young men and women come to faith in Christ. They are part of the BWA. Do not desert them. They need your love and support!

In 1990, there was only one Baptist Church in Moscow. Today, there are 52. Do not desert the Russian Baptists who for long suffered from religious

persecution! Indeed, we belong together because we belong to Christ!

- ◆ **Together in Christ helping the needy.**

In cooperation with Hungarian Baptist Aid, Baptist World Aid has helped recover earthquake victims in Iran and India. BWAid gives food to the starving in Mozambique and Ethiopia. Baptist World Aid has helped flood victims in China, hurricane victims in Honduras, and projects to aid women in India and street children in Brazil.

Do not desert your brothers and sisters in these countries! They need your help, your fellowship and your love! Indeed, we belong together, because we belong to Christ!

- ◆ **Together in Christ, we defend persecuted Christians.**

A pastor is imprisoned today in Turkmenistan; the BWA is defending his religious freedom. Through the United Nations and in contact with governments, the BWA protests religious persecution of our brothers and sisters in difficult places.

Often parts of the former Soviet Union have imposed strict laws prohibiting the free exercise of religion. The BWA defends the right of Baptists to pray and worship without hindrance from the state!

Do not desert Baptists suffering from lack of religious freedom in many countries in the Middle East and Asia. Do not desert those suffering for righteousness' sake. Indeed, we belong together because we belong to Christ!

- ◆ **Together in Christ we fellowship.**

The BWA congresses and youth conferences, seminars and council meetings are opportunities to fulfill the biblical mandate for fellowship: "If

we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John1:7) Who will ever forget when, at the BWA congress, one of the first Baptists from Albania confessed, “I did not know I had so many brothers and sisters.” Indeed, as Baptists gather, we can sing for joy, “What a fellowship, what a joy divine!”

Biblical fellowship is suffering with those who suffer from religious persecution, crying with those who cry at the great injustices of evil systems of government, holding hands with those who face a lonely and oppressive future, rejoicing with those who rejoice over new-found freedom, and the story goes on. From 1950 to 1980 Billy Graham, was always one of the main speakers at the Congress, and he often began by saying: “Yes! I support the Baptist World Alliance.”

Come to England in 2005 have real Christian fellowship in Jesus’ name! Indeed, we belong together, because we belong to Christ!

Millions of Baptists will celebrate BWA Day on the first Sunday of February. Join hands with your brothers and sisters as your local congregation unites in prayer and praise for that unity that alone comes from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Indeed, because we belong to Christ, we belong to one another! Thanks be to God!

Denton Lotz is the general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

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