

DEC 10 1996

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**(BP)**

**-- BAPTIST PRESS**  
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

December 9, 1996

96-213

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Supreme Court accepts case  
about Internet pornography

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
12/9/96

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court is set to decide this term to what extent the federal government may protect children from pornography on the Internet.

The high court announced Dec. 6 it had agreed to review a federal court ruling blocking enforcement of the Communications Decency Act, which was signed into law by President Clinton in February. While no date was set for oral arguments in the case, which is *Reno v. the American Civil Liberties Union*, they will not be held before March. A decision should be handed down by July.

The Communications Decency Act was enacted as part of the Telecommunications Reform Act. The CDA portion of the law prohibits the distribution through on-line computer services of indecent material to a person under 18 years of age. The legislation defines indecency as a depiction or description of "sexual or excretory activities or organs" which is "patently offensive," according to community standards.

Those found guilty of knowingly disseminating indecent pornography may be imprisoned for a maximum of two years and forced to pay a fine. The legislation would apply whether the material was sent directly to a minor or displayed in a manner available to a minor.

Under the legislation, on-line services and access providers are not held liable for providing access to systems or networks over which they have no control. If the provider is aware it has such material available, it is liable.

In addition to protecting minors from indecency, the law clarifies existing obscenity laws that apply to the Internet.

In June, a Philadelphia federal court struck down CDA, ruling its definition of indecency was vague and the law was too broad. The ACLU brought the suit and was joined in protesting the law by on-line providers such as America Online and CompuServe and other organizations, including the Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

The National Law Center for Children and Families, which filed a brief at the federal level, is "almost positive" the Supreme Court will uphold the definition of indecency, said Bruce Taylor, the organization's president.

Southern Baptist public policy specialist Will Dodson said, "This is a very important First Amendment free speech case. I'm very hopeful that the Supreme Court will reverse the lower court and hold that the Communications Decency Act is constitutional.

"It is bad enough that adults are not protected from pornography which the Supreme Court does not consider obscene. However, surely the justices will find it in their hearts to protect children from this harmful material," said Dodson, the Christian Life Commission's director of government relations.

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Sen. Dan Coats, R.-Ind., coauthor of CDA with Sen. James Exxon, D.-Neb., who is retiring, said he is eager for the high court to rule in the case.

"Our goal in drafting this legislation was twofold," Coats said in a written statement. "Sen. Exxon and I wanted to design a bill that would pass constitutional muster. And we wanted to craft a bill that would assist parents in keeping the worst, most-degrading and rawest forms of pornography from young eyes and minds."

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**Lead in spiritual warfare,  
Blankenship urges musicians**

By Charles Willis

Baptist Press  
12/9/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Church musicians need to take their songs outside the church to meet the needs of today's people, just as musicians in the Bible accomplished ministry tasks, a national church music director has challenged other musicians.

Speaking to state church music leaders during annual planning sessions at the Baptist Sunday School Board, Dec. 5-6, Mark Blankenship, director of the board's music ministries department, said music ministry today may be too focused inside the walls of churches.

While early Christian musicians led in battle, ministered in prison and soothed sufferers, Blankenship said he wonders if today's singers "are on the battlefield as we engage the enemy in spiritual warfare."

"When is the last time the imprisoned have heard your voice or mine singing of God's love and grace?" he asked.

"I fear that most of the time we are content to sit in our reinforced edifices of spiritual fellowship and rarely venture out with our music to confront the bastions of apathy, poverty, war, racial tension, amoral laws or the misinterpretations of sound moral laws," he said.

"It seems the bulk of our music evangelism efforts and music spiritual warfare are tied to our corporate worship times or to mass gatherings of several church bodies in another corporate rally," he continued, "or we relegate our evangelism efforts to the contemporary Christian recording artists and their ministries."

He warned against musicians only feeding "the insatiable Christian music appetite of average church members while rarely sharing the music of our faith outside the walls of our structures."

The message of God's peace, he said, can be taken to political arenas, nursing homes, war zones, mass communication outlets, to the homeless and the poor, among others.

He urged Southern Baptist music leaders to influence churches to take their music ministry efforts to the world.

"We must be the visionary expanders of how our wonderful music ministries can touch people where they are, not just in our churches," he said.

Leaders must also "get their own hands dirty and their musical 'backs' tired," he added. "We can only lead where we have been or are willing to go. Let's move ourselves and the influence of the churches we serve to a new vision of a lost world."

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**Mercer trustees affirm  
Godsey and Baptist ties**

By William Neal

Baptist Press  
12/9/96

MACON, Ga. (BP)--Mercer University trustees issued a resolution Dec. 5 affirming both the school's president, R. Kirby Godsey, and the university's long relationship with the Georgia Baptist Convention.

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All but six of the 45 trustees were in attendance at the Dec. 5 meeting in Macon, Ga., voting unanimously for a document that affirms the president "as a Christian, as a Baptist and as an able and effective leader for Mercer University."

The resolution went on to say, "we wish to affirm, without reservation, the University's commitment to being a Baptist university."

The trustees' resolution was in response to a resolution passed in September by the Georgia Baptist Convention executive committee, and affirmed by the Georgia Baptist Convention in November, that repudiates some of the theology espoused in Godsey's recent book, "When We Talk About God ... Let's Be Honest."

Lester Cooper, chairman of the GBC executive committee; J. Robert White, executive director-treasurer of the Georgia Baptist Convention; and Frank Cox, president of the convention, all were invited to attend the trustee meeting and address the gathering. Cooper became the chief spokesman in presenting the concerns addressed by the convention's resolution.

Cooper noted the resolution "calls us to affirm the doctrinal truths that Baptist have held dear. (It) calls us to realize the book ... represents a significant departure from Baptist doctrine. The resolution asks Dr. Godsey to respect the heartfelt convictions of fellow Baptists, reconsider his theological convictions, and refrain from publishing verbally or otherwise doctrine which is foreign to Georgia Baptists. The resolution speaks of working within the trust that Georgia Baptists have placed in Mercer University as a Georgia Baptist institution."

Following the remarks by the convention representatives, trustees discussed their response and adopted their resolution. The framework for the resolution that was eventually adopted was prepared in advance but there were apparently some revisions made within the board meeting before the final draft was approved. Mercer Board meetings are closed to the press.

In a news conference following the board meeting, David E. Hudson, an Augusta lawyer who serves as chairman of Mercer trustees' executive committee, reiterated the trustees' support of Godsey, but noted Godsey was aware of the concerns of Georgia Baptists and would take steps in the future as outlined in the resolution.

The resolution states Godsey will as a believer and a scholar "continue to consider and reconsider his views on the issues which have led to the present controversy." Godsey was asked by the press if that statement was a recantment of statements made in his book. He said he was not recanting and that he had no regrets about what he wrote, but he did state, "I regret the kind of pain it has created for some people." He noted he was always reconsidering his viewpoints and he does listen to what others think. "I want to be more sensitive to the concerns of Georgia Baptists," he said.

When asked about the issue of timing of his book, Godsey responded, "The issue of timing never occurred to me." He noted the development of the book took place over a period of time and the timing of its publication was "not measured in political terms."

When Hudson was asked by a reporter why Mercer remains a Baptist school, he responded by saying that for the most part the relationship between Mercer and the convention has been harmonious and cordial, despite occasional flareups. He expressed his opinion that the Baptist background was the best underpinning for a private university, referring to Baptists' traditional beliefs in separation of church and state and the priesthood of the believer. "I'll do everything in my power," he said, "to make sure the connection is never severed."

In the same news conference, Lester Cooper was reticent about trying to predict how the GBC executive committee would respond to the Mercer resolution, but noted he found some aspects of the resolution "encouraging" but wanted to see some "solid building blocks" added to it. He said it was a sign of some progress anytime Baptists could get together and discuss their differences.

The chairman of the Mercer trustees was invited to bring the trustee response to the meeting of the GBC executive committee scheduled for Dec. 10.

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The text of Mercer trustees' resolution is posted in SBCNet News Room under MERCER.RES.

**Santa, TV ads needn't detract  
from Christ-centered Christmas** By Pamela A. Terrell

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Christmas decorations appear in stores in October, and Santa makes his grand entrance at the local mall before Thanksgiving has come and gone.

Because retail and discount stores make the bulk of their profits during the Christmas season, they want consumers thinking about Christmas gifts earlier and earlier each year. Children are bombarded with television commercials about the latest, and sale ad inserts fill weekend newspapers.

With so much emphasis on gift giving, what are our children learning about Christmas? Are we simply using the birth of Jesus as an excuse for extravagant parties and elaborate purchases? Where does the myth of Santa Claus fit into all of this? The following suggestions may help you and your family plan a fun-filled, Christ-centered approach to this holiday season:

**GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER.**

Many Christian families are choosing to omit Santa Claus from their Christmas celebrations as they fear they are not being truthful to their children ("Santa lives in the North Pole with eight reindeer"), providing wrong motivation for expected behavior ("Santa only visits good children") and encouraging greediness ("What is Santa going to bring you for Christmas?")

While these are valid concerns, there is no way to completely shield your child from Santa Claus. He is a part of Americana, and children encounter him in stores and on Christmas decorations, in addition to singing songs about him and hearing other children at school and church talk about him. So what is a parent to do?

First, don't count down the days until Santa comes or mention Santa every time you discuss Christmas. Count the number of days until Jesus' birthday instead. An inexpensive calendar can help you do this. Remember to choose one that culminates in Jesus' birth rather than Santa's arrival.

Second, tell your children the true legend of Saint Nicholas instead of rehashing familiar stories about Santa's reindeer and his house at the North Pole. Saint Nicholas was a real person with admirable Christian qualities, and your children can learn about cheerful and generous giving from his example.

Finally, there are some excellent educational books about Santa Claus, like "The Story of Santa Claus" by Teresa Chris (Chartwell Books, Inc., 1992). Children can learn the historical origin and development of Santa and see exactly how he came to be the jolly bearded man in the red suit we know today.

Children can also learn how youngsters in other nations celebrate Christmas with Santa Claus, such as French children anticipating the arrival of Pere Noel (Father Christmas) and leaving their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with nuts, sweets and small trinkets. Children in the Netherlands await Saint Nicholas on Dec. 6 (Saint Nicholas's Day) and then celebrate the birth of the Christ child traditionally on Dec. 25.

**DO NOT CONFORM ANY LONGER TO THE PATTERN OF THIS WORLD.**

Check out your Christmas decorations, and make some mental notes. If you are trying to emphasize Christ in Christmas, but most of your Christmas decor displays Santa and snowmen, you're sending your family a mixed message.

At our house, we make a point of having few decorations of Santa (only a few ornaments). Instead, we have a beautiful creche as the focal point in our home with special touches such as an angel tree-topper and wise men candlesticks. You don't have to spend a lot of money to have Christ-centered decorations. Give your children some old Christmas cards, glue, string, plastic lids, glitter and paper, and they can do a fine job making things to hang on the tree.

Another suggestion for young children is to have at least one unbreakable nativity scene, such as one made out of fabric, plastic or resin. Children can manipulate the nativity figures and act out the Christmas story. A hands-on approach always aids in learning and entertaining.

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## IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.

Children start Christmas lists months before the big day arrives, stand patiently in line to tell Santa their Christmas wishes and eagerly pour over the latest Christmas catalogs. You're left wondering if that one special toy your child wants this year (along with a few thousand other kids) will lead to a fruitless search all over town trying to obtain that coveted plaything. Mom and Dad, you can help quell that greediness and enable your children and yourselves to experience the true spirit of giving this Christmas.

Children need to know they will not receive everything on their Christmas list. Even if you have the financial resources to make their Christmas dreams come true, you are doing them an ultimate disservice in the important lessons of giving and receiving if you cater to every whim. You might want to give a few requested items and some surprises. Christmas is also a good time to present children with useful gifts (underwear, socks, sweaters) and educational ones (books, a science kit, a sewing set).

For children of preschool age and older, let them have a hand at being "Santa" to someone. Many churches sponsor local families, and most communities have local programs like an "Adopt-an-Angel" program where you can purchase gifts off of an "adopted" child's Christmas list. Reading the "angel's" wish list may prove to be a lesson in itself as these underprivileged children often request warm winter coats or toys for younger siblings instead of indulgent gifts for themselves. Then your child can purchase a few items on the wish list and also purchase a "special surprise" -- a toy he or she would most like to have but is willing to give to someone else his or her age.

Depending on your family, you might like to let your children select one child together or each have their own adopted child (same age and sex as themselves). Some parents give their children money to budget while making these purchases, and others encourage their children to do chores around the house or neighborhood to earn the money. Either way, you are teaching your children the important lessons of budgeting money and joyful sacrificial giving.

Finally, for family gift giving, inspire your family to make gifts for one another. Odds and ends such as shoe boxes, paper towel tubes and styrofoam meat trays can be transformed into creative gifts by a preschooler. Teach older children some of your favorite talents such as knitting, quilting, baking, woodworking or leather tooling.

One last hint: As a parent it is tempting to go overboard at Christmas, especially when buying gifts for your children. Before you head out to the mall, plan a budget and make a list of prioritized items.

## A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN.

At last ... the big night and big day have arrived. Plan on making Christmas Eve a special family time. The evening might start out with a special service at church or a carol sing. Once you are home for the evening, quietly enjoy the closeness of your family. Christmas Eve is a wonderful time to build a fire and sip hot chocolate while you look through old photo albums, watch home movies or swap family stories. Your children will love to hear what you were doing when you were their age (especially from the grandparents' point of view). Before sending the children off to bed, sing Christmas carols by the light of the Christmas tree. Most important of all, read the story of our Savior's birth from the second chapter of Luke, so children can anticipate his birthday.

As Christmas morning arrives, the children will probably awaken in the early hours. After shouts of "Merry Christmas" and exchanging of gifts, encourage the family to enjoy a leisurely breakfast together. Keep breakfast simple -- cinnamon rolls, coffee and orange juice. This is a special family time, and you shouldn't spend your morning in the kitchen. Most families plan a big, special lunch on Christmas Day. Again, prepare as much of the meal ahead of time so you are not stuck in the kitchen all day.

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Turn the meal into a special celebration of Jesus' birth. Set a place at the head of the table as a silent reminder of the special guest in your home. For dessert, sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus and enjoy a birthday cake in his honor.

In the afternoon, the family can relax together as the children enjoy playing with their new gifts. A wonderful way to end the day is with a family prayer of thanksgiving for the best gift ever given -- Jesus Christ.

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Terrell is a speech and language pathologist in Carthage, Mo. This article appeared in the December issue of Home Life magazine, published by the Baptist Sunday School Board.

St. Nicholas' legend  
dates from 3rd century

By Pamela A. Terrell

Baptist Press  
12/9/96

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Yes, there was a Saint Nicholas, but he lived no where near the North Pole.

Nicholas was born in about A.D. 280 in the town of Patras, located in what we know as Turkey. He was raised in a wealthy and well-educated family and was named the Bishop of Myra as a young boy. He was well regarded for his extreme kindness and generosity as described in the following story.

According to legend, there were three unmarried daughters in Patras who came from a good but poor family. They could not get married because they had no dowries, so their father planned to sell them when they reached a marriageable age.

Nicholas heard of these girls' fate and was quite distressed. He secretly delivered a bag of gold to the oldest sister of marrying age. Her family was ecstatic about her good fortune, and she was happily married.

When the next daughter became old enough to marry, Nicholas delivered a bag of gold to her, too. Legend says Nicholas tossed the bag through an open window, and it landed in some stockings that were hanging by the fire to dry.

When the youngest daughter became marrying age, the father was determined to identify the mysterious gift giver as he suspected his third daughter would be secretly given a bag of gold, too. The father kept watch all night and discovered Nicholas was the generous giver.

Nicholas' identity and generosity were made known, and similar stories of his charity and kindness spread across the land. From that time on, anyone who received an unexpected gift thanked the good Saint Nicholas. We get our English word Santa Claus from the Dutch words Sinter Klaas, which is what they call their favorite saint, Nicholas.

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Penn/Jersey Baptists  
OK 7% budget increase

Baptist Press  
12/9/96

ALTOONA, Pa. (BP)--A budget increase of 7.3 percent was approved during the 26th annual meeting of the Baptist Convention of Pennsylvania-South Jersey.

A total of 215 messengers attended convention sessions Nov. 7-9 at the Ramada in Altoona, Pa., representing the 25,000 Baptists in the two-state region's 262 churches and missions.

The 1997 budget of \$2,287,216, up 7.3 percent over the current year, includes \$665,668 in anticipated Cooperative Program giving from the congregations in the convention.

An .25 percent increase in CP allocation to Southern Baptist Convention national and international ministries was approved, raising the CP percent of budget to 23.25.

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The convention's officer slots were filled without opposition: president, George Sanders, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church, Altoona; first vice president, Kathy Sheldon, pastor's wife, Bux-Mont Baptist Church, Hatboro, Pa.; second vice president, Andy Stabler, member of First Southern Baptist Church, Williamsport, Pa.; and recording secretary, Melba Boudreaux, member of Dallas (Pa.) Baptist Church.

In other business, the convention adopted various revisions to the convention's executive board structure.

Resolutions included:

-- appreciation for Harold Price, who is retiring after 21 years with the convention, most recently in the position of director of church development.

-- opposition to any expansion of gambling in Pennsylvania or New Jersey.

Next year's annual meeting will be Nov. 6-8 in Williamsport, Pa.

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Reported by Glenna Hegenbart.

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