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News Analysis

Nixon's Welfare Proposals
Offer Church Opportunities

by W. Barry Garrett
Washington Regional Editor, Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (BP)--President Richard M. Nixon's proposal to scuttle the nation's welfare system and to create a more far-reaching family assistance program presents the churches with new opportunities of service to people.

Coupled with his proposed reforms in the Office of Economic Opportunity, reformed manpower programs and shared responsibilities with states and local governments, the churches may also face new and more difficult problems in church-state relations.

Like a bolt of lightning the President's August 8 nationally televised speech on domestic problems jolted the country like nothing has done in a generation. Republicans were shocked that a conservative President would propose a program that ultimately would exceed anything the Democrats had been able to do in all their years of power.

Liberals were left gasping and seeking to find vulnerable spots where they could attack the President's plan.

Others reacted like W. A. Criswell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, did to the Texas decision to raise the state's welfare ceiling to aid the aged, blind, handicapped, and poverty-stricken children. He said, "It's not being 'liberal'... (theologically) to minister to the needs of the hungry, the disabled and the sick. It's just simply being Christian."

Everyone agreed that Nixon's speech kicked off a national discussion that will not stop until something is done about the issue he raised.

The specifics of the President's program will take the form of proposed legislation to be introduced in Congress in September. This will trigger a long series of hearings and even longer debate among the Congressmen and Senators. No one expects the new law to emerge as proposed, but everyone expects something to happen.

Three questions arise: (1) Briefly, what did the President propose? (2) What new opportunities would this plan offer to the churches? (3) What church-state issues will confront the nation in the future?

President Nixon's Proposals

The President explained his purpose: "To present a new set of reforms -- a new set of proposals -- a new and drastically different approach to the way in which government cares for those in need, and to the way the responsibilities are shared between the state and federal governments.

"This new approach," the President continued, "is embodied in a package of four measures: first, a complete replacement of the present welfare system; second, a comprehensive new job training and placement program; third, a revamping of the Office of Economic Opportunity; and fourth, a start on the sharing of the federal tax revenues with the states."

Nixon's new program would abolish welfare as it now exists and would adopt in its place a new family assistance system. This system would provide a participating family of four with a minimum income of \$1600. It would encourage family stability among the poor and would provide work incentives for an income of \$4,000 before public payments are stopped.

Persons able but unwilling to work would not be included in the program. Persons unable to work such as the blind, aged, or disabled would receive other benefits.

In order to provide a "full opportunity" for every American, Nixon proposed "a complete overhaul of the nation's manpower training services." According to the President, the New Manpower Training Act would:

*Pull together the jumble of programs that currently exist, and equalize standards of eligibility.

*"Provide flexible funding so that federal money would follow the demands of labor and industry, and flow into those programs that people most want and need;

*"Decentralize administration, gradually moving it away from the Washington bureaucracy and turning it over to states and localities."

The President plans to reorganize the Office of Economic Opportunity. It will be transformed from a programming agency to the research and development arm for government's social programs.

In his revenue sharing proposal, the President would devise a plan to share with states and local governments a percentage of the federal income. This he called "the new federalism" which puts greater responsibility on government outside of Washington.

New Challenge to the Churches

Although the President did not address himself to questions of church programming in relation to government, his proposals have vital affects in these areas. A possible by-product of the new Nixon reforms could be new opportunities for churches to assist increasingly in services to people.

During his campaign and since his inauguration President Nixon has stressed ideas of government and private agencies working together. This inevitably includes the churches and their institutions.

A major contribution the churches can make as the new reforms take place is to share their concerns for people, their motivations for justice, and inclusion of all people in the new institutions of government that will be developed. The formative stage is the time for the churches to be especially active.

An example of community service that could be offered through the churches under the new proposals is in the area of child care programs. President Nixon proposes a vast program of child care for working mothers. The major obstacles to the success of such programs are lethargy on the part of local officials, lack of facilities and scarcity of personnel.

The churches have the motivation, the buildings and the people to offer for child care centers. There are ways and methods for churches and governments to work together in such programs without violating principles of separation of church and state.

Many other programs involving services to **people** will emerge in which the churches can participate for community service contributions.

Emerging Church-State Issues

The over-riding church-state problem in the new developments will be the shift of responsibility from the federal government to the state and local governments.

Until recent years the major church-state battles have been fought on the federal levels. In the future the churches will find it necessary to solve these problems in their own states and in their own communities.

This makes church and state correlation more difficult, because it is harder to settle such issues amicably and justly on the local level than on the national level. This means that pastors and churches must become experts on church-state relations and in the ways churches may and may not work with the government.

As the federal government develops a partnership with state and local governments, probably there should be a similar working relationship between national church public affairs agencies and state and local organizations to achieve a balance in proper church and state cooperation.

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Police Raid on Underground
Church Teaches Youth Lesson

by Jim Newton

PENSACOLA, Fla. (BP)--An underground church service held by 70 youth from the First Baptist Church here ended in the city jail after police raided the abandoned warehouse near the docks while the "secret" service was being held.

In the process, the 70 young people learned a little better what it must have been like to be a First Century Christian in a culture where religious persecution was prevalent.

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It was all a part of a plan by the church staff, headed by Pastor James Pleitz, Youth Director Helen May, and Music Minister Paul Royal, to make the experience of early Christians related in the Bible become more real to the youth.

The police raid was staged and planned by the church staff, but the young people didn't think so after they saw the flashing blue lights and the paddy wagons.

"We were really scared, it seemed so real," said Miss Barbara Hughes, one of the youth who was present.

"We all thought it was rigged at first, but when we saw the flashing blue lights and the paddy wagon, it seemed so real," related Miss Hughes, a student at Pensacola Junior College here and member of the church.

The service had only gone about 15 or 20 minutes when Capt. Robert Goodwin and three other police officers shined their powerful flashlights into the candle-lit warehouse.

Mrs. May and Mr. Royal attempted to explain that they had the owner's permission to use the warehouse, but Captain Goodwin demanded written permission. "That doesn't make any difference," he said. "You still have to obey the law."

With that, the entire group was sent to the jail in their own cars, the police taking down their license numbers and counting heads to make sure everyone went.

Once at the jail, Mrs. May and Mr. Royal suggested that they continue the service. The sounds of music sung with youthful intensity reverberated throughout the jail, and a young serviceman brought a brief message, relating the situation of the youth in jail to Bible stories of early Christians imprisoned for their beliefs.

"It really made us stop and think about how the early Christians were persecuted, and about the rights and privileges we have in America," related Miss Hughes. "It made the Bible so real."

Miss Hughes added that a lot of people who read of the account in the newspapers misunderstood and thought that the young people really were arrested and put in jail, and had asked the youth about it. "It gives you an opportunity to say something about the Church and about being a Christian," she said.

Earlier during the week, the youth held a "secret" service at an underground gun battery where they re-enacted the Lord's Supper, sharing a large loaf of bread.

The next day they boarded two fishing boats for a second "secret" meeting led by a professor at the University of West Florida, John Mosely.

The third meeting was a re-enactment of the experiences of Christ and his disciples in the Garden of Gethesemane.

Pleitz, pastor of the church and former chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, said that the young people of the church responded to the unique Teenage Bible Study Group better than anything the church had done in a long time.

"I believe as a result of the week that our young people have a greater appreciation than ever of the privilege which is ours to worship God as we please, and a deeper appreciation for what the early Christians went through so we can have these freedoms we enjoy," Pleitz said.

It was Pleitz who "arranged bail" for the youth, and got them out of the jail. Miss Hughes recounted that when he arrived at the jail, he dramatically exclaimed, "What are you doing here in jail?"

After being "released" from "jail," the young people returned to the church for the Pizza party.

August 14, 1969

Fear, Threat of Conflict
Called Extremism Sources

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)--Fear and a sense of threat brought on by growing class and racial conflicts were cited here as principal sources of extremist behavior in America by a seminary professor speaking at Glorieta Baptist Assembly here.

C. Arthur Insko, professor of Christian ethics at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary in Mill Valley, Calif., said that extremist black militants have been produced by frustration born of denials and deprivation in the midst of widespread enjoyment of freedom and wealth.

Speaking to a conference on "Extremism--Left and Right" sponsored by the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, Insko observed that opposition to legitimate demands from the oppressed would continue to produce extremist militants.

Just as the frustrations of black militants have increased, so have the frustrations of the segregationist intensified as legal barriers to racial minorities have come down, the professor said.

Insko characterized the thought process of the segregationist this way: "He knows that the changes are irresistible in the long run. However, he obstructs the process wherever he can, in hope of delaying the inevitable. Meanwhile, he nurses his hatred at a frightful cost to himself and his children."

Of all the elements that contribute to extremism in America, none is more significant than the modern individualistic view of man, Insko observed. "It is basic in the ideology of extremists from both the left and right today.

Fundamentalist Christianity is interpreted largely in individualistic terms, and thus "the biblical view of man as a member of community is ignored and the social dimension of the gospel is denied," he stressed. "Religion becomes a lonely affair between the individual and his God.

"The legacy of modern individualism is also seen in the leftist extremism of our time," Insko added. "Communism seeks the collectivization of society in the interest of the common man, But it destroys genuine community among men by its commitment to class warfare."

The week-long conference featured addresses by eight Christian ethics professors at Southern Baptist theological seminaries.

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Cook Named Training
Union Head in Florida

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--Robert S. Cook of Nashville, adult consultant in the church training department for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, has been named secretary of the Training Union department of the Florida Baptist Convention here.

Cook has for the past 17 years been on the staff of the national Training Union department in Nashville.

A native of Texas, he is a graduate of Baylor University, Waco, Tex., and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. He also was minister of education at Saginaw Baptist Church, Fort Worth. He has done additional graduate work at the University of Tennessee and George Peabody College in Nashville.

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