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June 9, 1970

Top SBC Leaders Protest
Vatican Envoy Appointment

DALLAS (BP)--Three top Southern Baptist leaders issued a joint statement here asking President Richard M. Nixon to rescind his appointment of a special representative to the Vatican.

The protest came from Carl Bates, newly elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention; W. A. Criswell, immediate past president of the SBC; and Jimmy R. Allen, president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Bates, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Charlotte, N. C., became president of the 11.4 million-member convention only three days before Nixon appointed Henry Cabot Lodge as special representative to the Roman Catholic Church at the Vatican.

Both W. A. Criswell, pastor of the 15,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas who preceded Bates in the denomination's top elected office, and Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church of San Antonio, Tex., had previously voiced strong opposition to the appointment of a Vatican envoy when President Nixon first announced he was considering the possibility.

Allen is also president of a nation-wide organization called Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a group with a long history of opposition to U. S. diplomatic ties with the Roman Catholic Church.

The joint statement issued by the three Baptist leaders said that Nixon's decision to appoint Lodge as a special diplomatic representative to the Pope "marks a dark day in the struggle to maintain freedom of religious conscience, and our American heritage of separation of church and state."

The statement continued:

"America's forefathers fought and died to separate their government from the entanglements of religious establishments. That heritage has been ignored by the Chief of State when he yielded to political pressure by some religionists to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

"It is the height of irony that a man elected on campaign promises to bring us together again should strike this serious blow to divide our American people.

"We regret that passions of religious divisiveness will be stirred by this tragically unwise step.

"When rumors circulated early in the Nixon administration that such a move was being contemplated, an avalanche of public protest was experienced by the White House.

"It is certain that many Americans of all religious persuasions and of none will be earnestly opposed to this unconstitutional admixture of the Chief of State.

"We earnestly urge President Nixon to rescind this unwise action," the statement concluded.

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Sunday School Board Names
Public Relations Staffer

NASHVILLE (BP)--Sidney D. Conner of San Angelo, Tex., has joined the staff of the office of public relations of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board as an information specialist.

A journalism graduate of Angelo State College at San Angelo, Conner also attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Fort Worth, Tex.

He formerly served as religion writer and reporter for the San Angelo Standard-Times and as assistant state editor for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. While in seminary, he was pastor of Mitchell Baptist Church near Cisco, Tex., and Spring Creek Baptist Church near Weatherford, Tex.

As an information specialist, he will be responsible for gathering and disseminating news, feature stories and other information about the work of the board.

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Easterly Named Editor Of
Broadman Juvenile Books

NASHVILLE (BP)--R. Lane Easterly, formerly editor of children's curriculum materials for the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department, has been named editor of juvenile books for Broadman Press.

A native of Tennessee, Easterly joined the board in August, 1968, after serving as minister of education at Harrodsburg (Ky.) Baptist Church for four years. Earlier, he was minister of education for Fern Creek (Ky.) Baptist Church.

He holds the bachelor of science degree in engineering from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and the master of religious education degree from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville.

Broadman Press is the general books publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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June 9, 1970

Baptists of Booming Bangkok
Seek a Strategy for Witness

by Ione Gray

BANGKOK, Thailand (BP)--In this booming, bustling city of 3 million, halfway around the world from New York City, Southern Baptist missionaries and Thai Baptists are attempting to find ways to present the gospel more effectively to an urbanized society with unique differences and difficulties.

Working with the missionaries and Thai Baptists is a specialist in urban missions, Francis M. DuBose, associate professor of urban and world missions for Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, Calif.

DuBose was invited by the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board to do an urban survey of Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Manila.

His study is part of the board's overall strategy of utilizing experts and modern techniques in its overseas program.

Although most of the wealth of Thailand is in the hands of a few, there appears to be a slowly growing middle class, at least in Bangkok.

A booming tourist center served by 25 major airlines and 8,763 first-class hotel rooms, Thailand draws many tourists both from the United States and Japan.

Most numerous among the visitors, however, are U.S. military men on leave from South Vietnam. They spent $22.5 million in Thailand during 1969. Along with their money they bring corruption, say the moral-conscious Buddhists of Bangkok.

One hears and reads of Communist infiltration in the north next to Laos and in the south next to Malaysia. An Australian missionary, Reg Vines, of the Plymouth Brethren, was injured by bullets from Communist terrorists in Phatthalung Province in mid-February.

Walking along the boulevards of hustling Bangkok, it is hard to believe that Thailand has any problems at all beyond those prompted by rampant prosperity. That is, before you see the crowded conditions of side streets and the sewer-infested slums.

Crowded streets and modern buildings now cover an area where 10 years ago there was nothing but mango orchards and betel nut trees and rice fields and buffaloes. Industrial plants, some employing as many as 2,000 persons, extend into the surrounding provinces. Numerous products which were imported 15 years ago are now produced in surplus, mostly because of new industrial developments in Bangkok.

Many of the khaki-colored, clogged klongs which crisscrossed the city a few years ago have given way to wide streets and new cars and motorcycles as people pour in from 70 provinces. Some klongs still exist for the benefit of tourists, travel, and the floating market venders, but Bangkok can hardly be described any longer as the Venice of the East.

One of the old businesses still thriving is the manufacture and sale of spirit houses. They are miniature stone buildings on pedestals, each a foot or two long and styled exactly like most of the temples: white columns all around, several steeply gabled roofs, one atop another, tiled in green and red and gold.

A common belief is that every plot of ground has a spirit. When one builds a house, he mustn't drive the spirit away, or he'll meet misfortune, many Thais believe. Hotels, even the most modern, have large spirit houses.

In addition, a common Thai belief is that one must make merit. How much merit a person manages to accumulate determines how he fares in this life and in whatever existence might come after that. One makes merit by doing something that is good.

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Merit at its highest is made by showing devotion to the Three Jewels, or Gems--to the Lord Buddha; to his teaching, the Dharma; and to the Sangha, the Brotherhood of Monks. This is done in uncounted ways in Thailand. Loyal Buddhists go to the 23,000 wats, or monasteries--tourists call them temples--carrying flowers, incense, and candles and putting gold leaf on a hundred thousand images of the Lord Buddha.

Only a small, devoted corps of Buddhists now attend the wats on holy days, but perhaps 90 per cent of the Thai people would quickly avow allegiance to Buddhism if asked. Buddhism is a state religion in Thailand, and the king is its head.

Tens of thousands of young men enter the Brotherhood of Monks. One sees their saffron robes everywhere, especially in early morning. A man can leave the Sangha, but the enormous merit he has made by having been a monk will stay with him. Some thinking young people say they are not Buddhists, but most of them do not yet see anything in Christianity.

Secularization and urbanization compound the problems of Christian witness in this country where every area of life is affected by some component of a deep-rooted atheistic religion supported by the government. Missionaries and Thai Christians see a few tokens of hope. (Only one half of one per cent of the people profess Christianity.)

Southern Baptist missionaries, along with DuBose and the SBC Foreign Mission Board, are seeking a strategy for evangelism and Christian nurture in Bangkok, where the perplexities of urbanization are added rapidly to a society embedded in Hinayana Buddhist culture.

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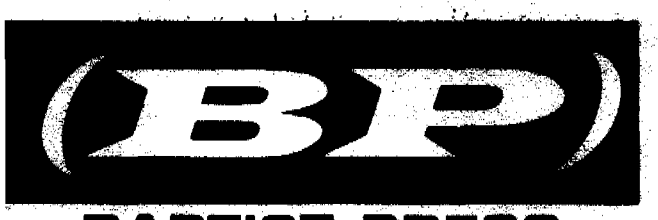
EDITORS NOTE: Ione Gray, international writer and editor for the SBC Foreign Mission Board, is in the Orient on assignment from the board. In addition, she is studying other phases of Southern Baptist mission work in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. She will go to Japan for the Baptist World Congress and remain for about 10 days of research and writing. She plans to spend the first two weeks of August in South Vietnam or in Hong Kong, returning to the United States in late August.



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