



BAPTIST PRESS

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July 24, 1972

Irwin Says Astronauts Were Wrong to Take Stamps to Moon

By Robert O'Brien

DALLAS (BP)-- Astronaut James Irwin, one of three Apollo 15 crewmen reprimanded for carrying unauthorized stamped souvenir envelopes to the moon, said, "We thought we doing the best thing for our families--but we were wrong."

Irwin said he and Astronauts Al Worden and David Scott decided last fall, in a change of heart, not to accept their share of a reported \$150,000 in proceeds from the sale of the envelopes in West Germany.

The shares, about \$8,000 each, would have gone into a trust fund for the astronauts' eight children, Irwin said in a telephone interview with the Baptist Press. He was reached in Cali, Colombia where he spoke to the Pan American Union of Baptist Men.

The decision to refuse the money said Irwin, a Southern Baptist layman, came about eight months before the envelope incident was reported internationally in mid-July.

"We acted in haste and under the terrific pressures of the pre and post flight schedule--but that does not excuse it." Said the slender U. S. Air Force Colonel.

"The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) had no choice but to reprimand us," continued the command pilot for the Apollo 15 lunar module.

Irwin, 42, the first of the three astronauts to comment publicly on the incident, said, "A spiritual encounter with God on the moon played a major part in my individual decision to refuse my share."

He said the original decision to set up the arrangement for the trust fund was "a team decision by the Apollo 15 crew and there was no time for us to re-evaluate the decision as a team in the hectic schedule after return to earth."

Irwin had announced in June plans to retire from both the space program and the Air Force on Aug. 1 to organize High Flight, Inc., a non-profit organization for Christian ministries.

"I don't think my mistake will damage my ministry through High Flight," Irwin told Baptist Press. "It portrays me as a human, subject to human frailty.

"I hope it will open up opportunities for me to relate meaningfully to others who also have made human mistakes and need God's love and forgiveness."

"I hope people will forgive me, as God has forgiven me, for yielding to a temptation which has been spotlighted by national publicity because of my position as an astronaut," he said.

The three astronauts carried 400 souvenir stamped envelopes, known to stamp collectors as postal covers, with them on the moon voyage, July 26-Aug. 7, 1971, along with 232 approved by NASA as personal mementos.

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The astronauts had arranged before the flight to give 100 of the postal covers to a friend in Germany for sale after completion of the Apollo program. The remaining 300, now impounded by NASA, were to be gifts for close friends.

But a West German stamp collector violated the agreement and sold them prematurely for \$1,500 each--prompting NASA's reprimand.

"We did not intend to make a secret of the additional postal covers," Irwin said.

"They were packaged just like all other personal items and were within weight limitations for personal mementos. But they were accidentally omitted from the spacecraft's manifest.

"I feel certain NASA would have approved us taking them as personal mementos if they had been listed properly," Irwin said. "But, as it turned out, NASA had no choice but to reprimand us. We should not have allowed them to be used for commercial purposes."

"I deeply regret that the incident has caused any criticism or embarrassment for NASA," he said.

"My experience with God on the moon involved a spiritual reawakening in which I re-discovered the need for me and people everywhere to re-evaluate their relationship to God and Jesus Christ," Irwin said.

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Deaf Children to "Hear" JOT on TV with Their Eyes

FORT WORTH (BP)--Children in schools for the deaf across the country will soon be able to "hear" Southern Baptists' top television star, JOT, "with their eyes."

JOT, star of the award-winning children's cartoon produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission here, hasn't learned sign language, however. He's too young to spell many words.

But all 17 of the JOT television episodes are being videotaped with written captions for use in teaching religious education programs for the deaf.

Schools in Texas and Tennessee are cooperating in the project. The idea came from Dean Cunningham, administrative assistant for the Texas School for the Deaf in Austin. It was picked up by the Southern Regional Media Center for the Deaf at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

The Southern Regional Media Center is a clearinghouse for schools for the deaf in the United States. It is funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, United States Office of Education.

Cunningham said he recognized JOT's potential for the deaf when he saw the cartoon on a local television station. He requested permission to videotape JOT with written captions aimed at the silent world of the deaf children.

"The Radio-TV Commission recognized another missions opportunity in an area previously untouched and agreed to send the entire series of 17 programs to Austin for videotaping," said Paul M. Stevens, the commission's executive director.

About 1,000 deaf children in Texas will be able to watch JOT on closed-circuit television through the project next September. Cost of the videotaping was borne by the Texas School for the Deaf.

When the Southern Regional Media Center for the Deaf in Knoxville learned about the Texas project, the center requested permission to duplicate the series for distribution to all schools for the deaf in the United States.

"We conducted a survey recently which revealed that more than 80 schools for the deaf have some type of television equipment and several are planning elaborate closed circuit tele-

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vision for students," wrote Roger S. Perkins, the center's assistant director.

Perkins added that arrangements have been established for duplicating and distributing the captioned television programs, including the JOT episodes produced by Southern Baptists.

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Georgia Governor's Wife Leads Ministry to Underprivileged

ATLANTA (BP)--A unique ministry of medical and recreational services for underprivileged children in one of Atlanta's poorest neighborhoods was opened officially by the wife of Georgia's governor who was a leader in getting a Baptist church to sponsor the project.

Called "Operation Touch 1972," the project is sponsored by the Northside Drive Baptist Church in northwest Atlanta.

"It is a genuine joy to see a church doing this type of thing for needy people in one of Atlanta's most needy communities," said Mrs. Jimmy Carter, wife of the Georgia governor and active member of the Northside Drive Church.

"This center will meet spiritual needs as well as physical needs," said Mrs. Carter, a leader in getting "Operation Touch 1972" underway. She officially opened the door at the dedication service here.

The church is operating a medical-recreational clinic in a small building formerly used by a brick company and a railroad company in the Pittsburg section near Atlanta Stadium. The area is predominately Black.

About 35 young people from Northside Drive church will operate the clinic, giving eye examinations, dental tests and anemia tests to children and teenagers.

Those needing eye or dental care will first be referred to Fulton County health officers for thorough screening and then be sent to one of four doctors or dentists in Northside Drive church who have volunteered their free services.

In addition to eye and dental tests, the youngsters will be offered instructions and supplies for good dental care.

The clinic building will also serve as headquarters for a recreational program for Pittsburg area youngsters. The 35 youth from Northside Drive church will supervise the recreation program.

Tony Callaway, youth minister at the Northside Drive church, is director of the clinic and head of the recreation program. He is working with Economic Opportunity Atlanta officials, and with other church leaders.

"Operation Touch 1972" is the second medical and dental project for Northside Drive church.

In 1971, the church sent 24 young people and a team of doctors and dentists to remote areas of Honduras to operate similar medical-dental clinics in six isolated villages.

In one of these villages, Gualcince, a tiny church was born with 10 charter members converted by workers in the clinic.

Another Northside Drive team is going back to Honduras in August to operate another clinic for two weeks, and to dedicate a church building which Northside Drive church has bought for the Gualcince church.

W. Forrest Lanier, pastor at Northside Drive, will lead the group going to Honduras in August.

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