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Baptists, Catholics, Jews,
Urge Grass Roots Dialogue

By Tim Nicholas

NASHVILLE (BP)--Religious leaders cannot be caught fiddling while Rome, Jerusalem, and Nashville burn, a Catholic priest said here in concluding remarks at the first Catholic, Jewish, and Baptist trilogue in history.

Edward Flannery, director of the secretariat for Catholic-Jewish relations for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, added, "The youth of this nation are turning to transcendentalism and humanism for answers, but not to any of us."

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, said he wants dialogue among the three faiths to continue because "How can you love me when you don't know what hurts me?"

M. Thomas Starkes, secretary of the department of interfaith witness of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and representative of the trilogue's third sponsoring agency, reminded participants that they need to continue to develop a "non-judgmental evangelism."

Starkes presented a resolution signed by the Southern Baptist trilogue participants calling on Southern Baptists to "combat overt and subtle anti-semitism and to confess past guilt in stereotypical thinking, exploitative evangelistic techniques, political practices legislating against Jews, and references to Jews as Christ-killers."

The resolution also encouraged lay Jewish-Baptist dialogue at the local level and cooperative acts of human ministry by both Jews and Baptists.

Participants held talks on "the meaning of the crisis of faith," racial and social justice, and a roundtable discussion of Key 73, a national interfaith evangelistic thrust, where the concensus was to "express caution and hope that Key 73 will avoid offending the religious heritage of non-Christians."

The last discussion presented views of "the Messianic hope in Christian and Jewish traditions."

Jewish theologian Ellis Rivkin spoke of the ushering in of "phase one" of the Messianic age with the advent of advanced technology and the sharing of it among nations.

Historically, he said, Christians have treated Jews better when there are fewer outside anxieties such as the need for food, clothing, and peace.

Rivkin, professor of Jewish history for Hebrew Union College--Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio, said the cycle of good-bad times is about over and men can begin to worry about the internal anxieties.

"Now man is free; he realizes that he needs to be saved," said Rivkin. "Man freed of constraint needs Christ more."

John Pawlikowski, professor at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, said the New Testament showed change and development in the Messianic hope when the Messianic age did not come immediately as New Testament Christians had expected.

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"The early Catholic church was sensitive enough to preserve the "not yet" tradition, leaving a tension of unfulfillment and waiting for Christ's second coming," said Pawlikowski.

"Paul struggled with the meaning of the Jewish covenant and we Catholics must admit that we are an incomplete religion, he said. "The true messianic age won't come until all people are saved."

William Hull, dean of the school of theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, attacked the subject from a third perspective, saying there was a radical redefinition of the messianic hope in the gospel of Mark, through the ministry of Jesus.

"For Jesus, the current concept of messiahship was not adequate for the interpretation of his ministry," said Hull. "The messiahship was not a title to be bestowed, but a job to be done."

"Every response of Jesus put God in the center of the stage; the Messiah is only God's servant," said Hull.

"If Jesus had shown himself to be the obvious Messiah to the world then there wouldn't be a valid Christology, said Hull. "The only true Christology demands faith."

A declaration of the trilogy symposium stated: "We hope that such meetings can continue at the grass roots level. In this way we hope to challenge effectively and forcefully the creeping secularization of American society..."

"We call for a recommitment to social consciousness and social action by religious groups in America. Specifically we call for religious leaders to come together in all cities as a coalition of concern on social issues."

The declaration also applauded the reported easing of the "education tax" inhibiting the exodus of Soviet Jews to Israel, asked for establishment of a rating system by the media for television movies, and "finally, we declare war on the greatest sin of all--despair. Working together, with the help of God, we believe we can build a world fit for human beings to live in."

The three-day trilogy was sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Nashville and Middle Tennessee and the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee; the Roman Catholic Diocese of Nashville and the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; and the Department of Interfaith Witness of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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Baptist Leader Opposes Changes
In Tax Law for Nonprofit Groups

3/28/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, testified before the Ways and Means Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in support of the existing law permitting tax deductions for charitable contributions.

Wood's testimony, which was well received and praised by a number of congressmen on the powerful committee, stressed the merit of tax deductibility for the broad range of nonprofit organizations and institutions. No special favors were asked for religious institutions as such.

As the top executive in the Baptist public affairs agency, Wood stressed that he was not speaking for any one Baptist or for all of them. However, he said, he represented the concerns of the Baptist Joint Committee, an agency sponsored by eight Baptist denominations in the United States, which had authorized him to present testimony before Congress on this matter.

The Baptist leader spoke also in behalf of the Baptist World Alliance in urging Congress to continue the present policy which frees churches and associations of churches from governmental control and supervision of their overseas operations and expenditures.

Wood presented testimony on five types of proposals before the Ways and Means Committee which would alter the tax status of nonprofit organizations. These are: repeal of tax deductibility

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of charitable contributions; the use of a uniform tax credit for charitable contributions; reduction of the ceiling for tax deductions to charitable organizations and institutions; limitations on gifts of appreciated property; and curtailment of overseas operations of charitable organizations.

Five reasons were discussed by Wood for continuing the special tax status of nonprofit organizations.

1. Contributions to charitable organizations promote pluralism and voluntarism in public life. One of the genuinely unique features of American life is the reliance which our system has on both pluralism and voluntarism, Wood said. Such pluralism was engendered and is sustained by the principle of voluntarism by which people, individually and corporately, determine which of a broad class of organizations, institutions and charities they will support.

"If government is the exclusive determiner of social priorities and if it alone finances all programs, a philosophical and administrative monism results," Wood declared.

2. Nonprofit organizations, institutions, and charities provide a substantial public service. Wood described the First Amendment prohibitions against government aiding directly or indirectly classes of people or organizations which are essentially religious or sectarian in their composition.

However, Wood pointed out, the internal revenue code establishes a broad class which is not essentially sectarian because it embraces all nonprofit organizations, both public and private.

"We hold that certain types of special tax status legally can be given to the 501(c)3 organizations as a whole. Tax deductibility of charitable contributions made without anticipation of direct personal or corporate gain is one type which can be justified, declared the Baptist executive.

3. Tax deductibility of charitable contributions does not involve government subsidy. Wood discussed at length the difference between subsidies and tax deductions. "Subsidy is pecuniary aid provided by government," he observed.

"Tax deductions, on the other hand, represent not government sponsorship of religious and charitable organizations but the accommodation of government to the sponsorship of such organizations by those individual citizens who have voluntarily chosen, out of their particular interests, to undertake such sponsorship.

"By their very nature, subsidies are necessarily more narrowly prescribed and controlled than tax deductions," Wood continued.

"The amount of a subsidy is determined by the government providing it, while the amount of tax deductions is dependent upon the voluntary contributions made by millions of individuals to charities and nonprofit institutions of their own choosing," Wood said.

4. The removal of tax deductibility of charitable contributions would reduce substantially public services presently available. Wood maintained that though government cannot constitutionally grant aid directly or indirectly to religious groups. It can and presently does encourage voluntary contributions to tax-exempt organizations which provide a number of public services.

"The diminishing of any of these services would inevitably place a heavier burden on government or reduce the services presently available."

Wood claimed further that the elimination of tax deductibility of charitable contributions would unavoidably and significantly reduce contributions now being made voluntarily to charitable organizations.

5. Uniform tax incentives to encourage charitable contributions provide equitable treatment within the nonprofit sector. As an example of this, Wood noted that no favored treatment of religion is provided in tax deductions for charitable gifts.

Wood maintained that such deductions meet constitutional requirements since no favored treatment of religion is provided for in the law. Also, the law permits gifts to a broad spectrum of groups, secular or nonsecular, public or private, which provide a variety of services.

In addition to opposing repeal of tax deductibility of charitable contributions, Wood commented on four other types of proposals being studied in Congress.

Regarding the use of a uniform tax credit for charitable gifts, Wood urged that this not be changed. To equalize the tax for a charitable contribution by establishing a fixed percentage which could be subtracted from taxes regardless of the amount of the contribution would tend to discourage large gifts to private charities.

The Baptist leader asked further that Congress not reduce the allowable ceiling for tax deductions. Presently this is 50 per cent of adjusted gross income with a five-year carryover for any excess.

"The present law is supportive of charities; and we submit that neither the percentage allowable nor the number of years to cover excess should be reduced." Wood urged.

The same arguments apply to the law regarding gifts of appreciated property, Wood continued. He requested the committee to stand firm in support of the policy of permitting the tax deduction of the full amount of a gift of appreciated property.

The final proposal regarding tax reform of special concern to religious groups is one that would curtail overseas operations of charitable organizations. Speaking for the Baptist World Alliance and Baptist Foreign Mission programs which have charitable purposes, Wood questioned the constitutionality of government regulation of church expenditures for mission purposes overseas.

In conclusion, the Baptist executive noted that there have been abuses of their nonprofit status by some nonprofit organizations. To eliminate these abuses, Wood suggested that the law provide a more careful delineation of the prerequisites for inclusion in the IRS category of nonprofit organizations.

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Baptist Men Postpone
Conference in Jerusalem

3/28/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--The first World Conference of Baptist Men, originally scheduled for Jerusalem in November 1973, has been postponed for a year and moved to Hong Kong.

David Y. K. Wong, chairman of the Men's Department of the Baptist World Alliance, said that the decision to change the time and place was made by departmental officers after the BWA Administrative Committee asked for reconsideration of the previously announced plans.

The administrative Committee, which met in Washington March 7-8, cited "prevailing conditions" as their reason for asking reconsideration. No further explanation was given, but observers indicated that both a lag in registrations and recent political unrest in the Middle East were involved.

Wong, an architectural engineer in Hong Kong, said that the focus of attention now will be given to expansion of a previously planned regional men's conference in Hong Kong in October 1974 and making it a worldwide meeting.

The announcement of the change was released from Baptist World Alliance headquarters offices in Washington.

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Southern Baptists Aid in
Managua Building Project

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Under the blazing Nicaraguan sun, ten Southern Baptist men are erecting solid wooden structures to replace Baptist churches lost in the Dec. 23 earthquake.

Seven of them from Texas and Oklahoma and two others drove down to join missionary Leslie Keyes of Honduras in a race against seasonal rains expected in early May.

The team, housed in a circus-type tent provided by the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention, designated two of their number to begin by building a kitchen for missionary Naomi Keyes. Mrs. Keyes came with her husband to cook for the volunteers during the five-week project.

The others began building a 40-by-25-foot storehouse for benches, pianos and other furniture of the First Baptist Church that had been deteriorating in the dust and sun. Four days after they began, much to the amazement of onlookers, they had the walls up, the roof covered with tin and most of the siding in place.

With these preliminaries behind them, they went to work on structures for the seven Baptist congregations who have been meeting under trees since the earthquake destroyed their churches.

Three of the Texans are from Muldoon: John Tripp, pastor of First Baptist Church; Wayne Null, a machinist; and Henry Russ, a builder. The others are Edgar Powell, a college maintenance supervisor from Baytown; Mike Hufstедler from Austin and Don Harville from Winters.

The latter two, professional carpenters, drove down in a pickup with supplies and were delayed almost a week in Mexico City by transmissions troubles. They expect to stay until the work is complete.

The others, members of Tahlequah (Okla.) Baptist Church, are Dale Welch professor of criminology at Northeastern State College; Larry Wallace, youth director for the church and a student at Northeastern; and Tom Brinkley, a professional carpenter and builder. Welch and Wallace are using their spring break to participate in the project.

Clark Scanlon, missionary field representative for the Caribbean area, pointed out that these men, none of them wealthy, are taking time off from school and work to put action to their prayers. "They were concerned," he said, "about the loss experienced by their brothers in Nicaragua; here was something they could do to express their faith, and they are doing it."

Rene Davila, president of the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention, said, "Many from all corners of the world sent food, but these men have given us a concrete expression of Christian love."