



BAPTIST PRESS

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**Baptists Join List Asking
Court To Hear Hargis Case**

WASHINGTON (BP) --The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs joined with several religious groups in petitioning the U.S. Supreme Court to hear a case involving the tax exempt status of Billy James Hargis' Christian Echoes National Ministry, Inc.

At issue are some key church-state questions: Can the government legally define the nature and scope of the mission of the church? Can government use its power to tax as a threat to the free exercise of religion guaranteed in the First Amendment? Is it the prerogative of government to judge which moral or political issues a church may speak to without losing its tax exemption?

The Baptist agency located here was one of several religious groups sponsoring an "amicus curiae" (friend of the court) brief in behalf of the Hargis organization. Chief sponsor of the petition was the National Council of Churches, a frequent target of criticism from Hargis, a minister from Tulsa, Okla.

The American Baptist Churches of the USA, a denomination belonging to both the Baptist Joint Committee and the NCC, was one of several religious groups listed separately in support of the plea.

In the petition, the religious groups said they do not necessarily agree with all, or even most, of Hargis' views on public questions, the expression of which has cost him his tax exemption. The religious petitioners maintained, however, that the issues at stake are sufficiently fundamental to threaten the religious freedom of all church bodies.

The Hargis case concerns the interpretation of Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code which grants tax exemption to churches and other religious organizations which qualify under its terms, namely:

"Corporations...organized and operated exclusively for religious...purposes...no substantial part of the activities of which is carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting, to influence legislation, and which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office."

The above section of the Internal Revenue Code has been interpreted differently by the IRS and two lower courts.

In 1964 the IRS notified Hargis that Christian Echoes did not qualify for tax exemption. In June 1971 Judge Allen E. Barrow of the Federal District Court in Tulsa ruled that the exemption was protected by the First Amendment and ordered the government to return \$103,493 that had been collected in taxes with interests

Last December the United States Court of Appeals for the 10th circuit in Denver, Colo., reversed the district court decision. This court said that Christian Echoes had engaged in "substantial and continuous" political activity and that some of its statements and programs were "activities which Congress intended shouldn't be carried on by exempt organizations."

Hargis appealed to the Supreme Court claiming that the government does not have the constitutional right to "censor" the statements and activities of religious organizations.

In filing the amicus brief, the religious bodies said they "strongly oppose" the limitation of Section 501 (c) (3) which, as interpreted by IRS and applied by the appeals court decision,

permits a wholesale audit of all the activities of religious organizations and limits tax exemption to those organizations "willing to restrict the exercise of their First Amendment rights . . ."

Further, they declared that the code, as applied, permits "gross entanglements" of the Internal Revenue Service in church affairs, "and favors (and thus tends to establish) religious organizations which by doctrine or tradition remain aloof from public questions."

Of greatest concern, the sponsors of the amicus brief maintained, "is the chilling effect of these statutory restrictions upon the most fundamental rights of all citizens--freedom of speech and of the press, and the right to petition the government--which is compounded here by even more profound threat to the free exercise of religion by churches to whom loss of federal tax exemption could prove disastrous."

In upholding the IRS position to strip Christian Echoes of its tax exemption, the appeals court held that First Amendment restraints under Section 501 (c) (3) were "in keeping with an overwhelming and compelling governmental interest: that of guaranteeing that the wall separating church and state remain high and firm."

The amicus sponsors said the lower court "wrongly assumes" that church and state should by their very nature occupy separate spheres of interest, when in fact the converse is true.

"The objective of the First Amendment is not to prevent church and state from both becoming involved in particular issues having both a moral and a political content. Rather the objective is to prevent, as far as possible, the intrusion of either into the exclusive precincts of the other," the religious groups maintained.

Sponsors of the amicus brief continued that the limitations on tax exemption as applied to religious organizations in the Internal Revenue Code upheld by the court below "have the potential of seriously weakening if not destroying the wall between church and state."

"These restraints elevate to a preferred status those religions which refrain from participation in moral issues of public concern, and represent a value judgment by the government on what the true function of a religion and its ministry should be.

"The prospect of the government deciding what should or should not be legitimate areas for religious concern and activity cannot be reconciled with the First Amendment requirement of government neutrality," declared the amicus petitioners.

If the Supreme Court agrees to hear the case, the Baptist agency will participate further as a "friend of the court" in support of Hargis, in keeping with action of the Baptist Joint Committee in its meeting in March of this year. If the court accepts the case, it will be argued sometime next fall or winter, with a decision expected by spring or summer 1974.

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Southeast Asia Relief Programs
Launched in Wake of Vietnam War

4/26/73

WASHINGTON (BP)--Baptists have set a minimum goal of \$50,000 for alleviation of suffering and assistance in reconstruction in Vietnam and nearby parts of Southeast Asia.

Chester J. Jump of Valley Forge, Pa., chairman of the Relief Committee of the Baptist World Alliance, said that actually twice this amount--\$100,000--is needed for "a program worthy of world Baptists."

Assistance to the war ravaged areas will begin in May, Jump announced, and will be administered in large part by Baptist organizations already in the area.

A total of nine to ten million persons are estimated to have been made homeless by the hostilities in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, Jump said. A large proportion of these are infants and children.

He estimated also that approximately one million persons are in need of medical attention, most of them civilians as distinguished from fighting personnel.

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Financial contributions--money, not materials--are being sought to underwrite the Baptist aid effort. Gifts can be channeled through denominational offices in all parts of the world, or sent direct to the BWA offices in Washington and London.

Governments of the world can be expected to provide a considerable amount of assistance. BWA officials said however that experience following other wars indicates that governmental distribution of aid often leaves some persons with needs unmet, and voluntary agencies, such as religious groups, can be helpful to those otherwise passed over.

Jump said further that the giving of aid by Baptists will be a real-life expression of Christian love and compassion. Baptist aid is not limited to Baptists or to Christians, but it is given in the name of Jesus Christ.

The money given will provide material aid--clothing, medical supplies, canned beef, milk and other food stuffs, blankets, and mats.

Provision must also be made for small quantities of such items as laundry soap, water buckets, and kerosene lamps.

However, because of the high cost of transportation and handling, the BWA does not solicit material donations, but asks instead for monetary gifts, which can be used by the Relief Department to purchase needed items for suppliers close to the point of need.

Relief in southeast Asia is in the tradition of the Baptist World Relief program of disaster relief. Thirty years ago Baptists of the world began combining their efforts for post-war relief in Europe.

As other armed conflicts have occurred, Baptists have sought to be helpful as soon as circumstances permitted.

A few years ago, a major effort was put forth after the civil war in Nigeria. Last year it was post-war relief in Bangladesh, and relief for Burundese following conflict within that country.

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Five Southern Baptists
Earn PRSA Accreditation

4/26/73

DALLAS (BP)--Five Southern Baptist representatives established several milestones here by passing comprehensive six-hour written and hour-and-a-half oral exams to receive accreditation by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Orville Scott, public relations director, and Robert O'Brien, press director, both of the PR staff of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, became the only PR representatives of a state SBC convention staff with PRSA accreditation.

James Teel, furloughing SBC missionary who serves as press representative for the Argentine Baptist Mission, is the first SBC Foreign Mission Board representative to seek and earn PRSA accreditation.

Teel, who has worked with mass communications and public relations in Argentina during the past 14 years, is spending his furlough in the Texas Baptist Stewardship Division in Cooperative Program promotion.

Charles Richardson, public information director at Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Tex., became the only PRSA-accredited public relations representative of a Southern Baptist undergraduate college.

With the accreditation of Theo Sommerkamp, associate PR director, the SBC Annuity Board joins the Texas convention as the only SBC organization with two accredited PRSA members. John Boskas, Annuity Board vice president, was accredited earlier.

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PRSA accreditation, the highest professional national PR standard, is now held by only 2,500 persons in the United States in any type of public relations.

Accreditation by the PRSA is available only to persons who have practiced PR for five or more years, completed a screening process and passed the comprehensive exams which cover every phase of the profession.

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Camping Facilities At Portland Available

4/26/73

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--A housing shortage for the June 12-14 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention has been relieved somewhat by arrangements here for 550 camping spaces, according to local Baptist leaders.

A Seventh-Day Adventist campground on Oatfield Road, Gladstone, Ore., a suburb of Portland, will now accept reservations for tent and recreational vehicle space.

Dan C. Stringer, executive secretary for the Northwest Baptist Convention and local arrangements chairman for the June gathering of Baptists from throughout the USA, said that 200 trailer spaces are available with full hook-ups for electricity, water and sewer for \$2.50 per day.

Another 200 spaces for trailers with all but sewer connections are available for \$2.00 per day.

Sites for 150 tents are also open to Baptists at the same campground. Some tents may be rented on the premises, Stringer said. Per day costs were not known at press time.

Persons interested in securing these facilities for the time of the Southern Baptist Convention are asked to write or call Roland C. Hood, Northwest Baptist Convention, 811 N.W. 20th Ave., Portland, Ore. 97209.

More than 5200 hotel and motel rooms have been assigned by the SBC Housing Bureau, Stringer said.

Cancellation of some hotel and motel reservations and a growing list of homes opened to Baptist visitors has now alleviated the previous room shortage and currently is meeting all room requests, Stringer stated.

Regarding the campground, Stringer said, "It is a very beautiful spot on the Clackamas River about eight miles south of the Portland Memorial Coliseum."

More than 10,000 Southern Baptists are expected to register for the Southern Baptist Convention sessions here.

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