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Fake "Bernstein" Pulls Hoax in Baptist Church

DALLAS (BP)--A man claiming to be Leonard Bernstein Jr. received a standing ovation at a Sunday evening service at First Baptist Church here when he presented a check for \$20,000 to its sanctuary choir.

The choir had just completed its dramatization of Handel's "Messiah" when the man handed a check to the pastor, W. A. Criswell, to take the choir to New York in the spring to perform with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

With tears in his eyes, the man said he and his father, whom he identified as world-famous conductor, Leonard Bernstein, were both Christian Jews and attended Calvary Baptist Church in New York City.

The next day, Jack Bird, director of communications for the church, largest congregation in the Southern Baptist Convention, announced the check and the man were a hoax.

Suspicion was first aroused when one church member said the famed conductor was too young, at 55, to be the father of the "generous" donor, guessed to be 35-40.

Church business administrator John Shanks then checked with the Wells Fargo Bank in a San Francisco suburb on which the check was written. Bank officials could not locate such an account.

Another phone call to Leonard Bernstein's office in New York revealed he has one son, Alexander, 20, a student at Harvard University. Also, Bernstein has no connection with the Baptist church in New York.

He also said a man fitting the same description had done the same thing in Oklahoma recently and was jailed for impersonation.

Criswell said he first heard about the man on the Sunday afternoon before the presentation was made when he received a phone call, supposedly from an official from ABC-TV in New York, saying a man named Leonard Bernstein Jr. would fly into Dallas Sunday night for the choir's performance.

The pastor said he had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the man. A number of television networks and media agents had been discussing the possibility of televising the church's "Messiah" dramatization, he said.

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Structure Study Committee
Has 22 Recommendations

12/21/73

By W. C. Fields
Director, Baptist Press

NASHVILLE (BP)--A four-year study of the national agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention reports that the denominational structure is basically sound but presents 22 recommendations for improvements and asks agency trustees to give attention to 97 "areas of concern."

The Committee of Fifteen released its report which will be acted on by the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) when it meets here Feb. 18-20. E. W. Price Jr. of High Point, N. C., is Committee of Fifteen chairman.

Most of the committee's 22 recommendations deal with internal operations of the agencies and relationships to be worked out between agencies, or call for the agencies to make further studies.

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If approved by the Executive Committee, seven of the recommendations would be passed on to the 1974 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Dallas, June 11-13.

The seven include a recommendation for a major review of Southern Baptist strategy in home and foreign missions by a special convention committee which would report back to the convention in June, 1976.

A separate but related recommendation asks convention authorization for a re-examination of mission education by the five agencies involved.

The report recommends a change in the program statement of the Southern Baptist Foundation to enable it to work jointly with Baptist state foundations to raise money from private sources for both the SBC and state conventions.

Another proposed action calls for the denomination's Education Commission to begin moving toward a goal of half of its financial support coming from Baptist colleges by 1980.

The Committee of Fifteen, a subcommittee of the SBC Executive Committee, also recommends that the Southern Baptist Convention appoint a special committee of seven persons to study and evaluate the Executive Committee and report back in 1975.

The American Baptist Theological Seminary, operated in Nashville jointly by the SBC and the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., is the focus of another committee proposal. A recommendation asks the SBC's commission which deals with the seminary to set standards and goals regarding enrolment, financial support and academic standards to be met by 1977, with the understanding that if they are not met the SBC would convert its portion of the assets to other forms of assistance for black religious workers.

The seventh recommendation, which will likely go to the SBC Dallas meeting, calls for an addition to an SBC bylaw requiring more information from SBC agencies for the budget-making process.

The added information would provide to the SBC Executive Committee data on the agencies regarding "long range program objectives, budget year program goals and action plans and past year program accomplishments toward reaching previously set goals and action plans."

The 129-page report released by Price contains a lengthy statement on convention-trustee relationships and calls for various procedures and actions to secure greater involvement of the individual trustee in policy-making responsibilities for the SBC agencies.

According to the report, 891 persons presently serve on SBC boards, commissions and committees. Among these 505 are ordained and 386 unordained, 39 of the latter being women.

Other committee recommendations call for an enlarged Inter-Seminary Council, a re-study of the Inter-Agency Council, a caution against unnecessary staff growth and a redefinition of the tasks of the denomination's five church program organizations.

One recommendation calls on the six Southern Baptist seminaries to formulate, by June, 1975, a broadly based program of services to non-degree students.

Other actions to be presented by the structure study committee to the SBC Executive Committee for its consideration, call for reduction or removal of overlapping work, duplication of effort and conflicts between Baptist agencies.

The committee report asks for investment guidelines from all agencies for the \$426,607,044 they currently have in stocks, mortgages and other securities. Most of this amount is administered by the SBC Annuity Board on behalf of retirement funds for Baptist workers. Its investment guidelines are included in the committee report as an addendum.

One committee recommendation calls for a study of retirement plans presently being operated by the Annuity Board and the agencies to assure Baptist workers the fullest possible benefits.

The Southern Baptist Convention completed a major re-organization in 1958 and 1959, following an extensive structure study assisted by the management firm of Booz, Allen and

Hamilton. The Committee of Fifteen assignment was to evaluate that earlier re-organization in the light of current circumstances and recommend any needed changes, Price said.

The committee initiated recommendations which the Executive Committee presented to the 1972 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the Brotherhood Commission and the Radio and Television Commission. These actions by the convention mainly broadened membership on each commission and the advisory groups related to them.

Another recommendation initiated by the committee and presented to the 1972 SBC meeting in Philadelphia called for dissolving the Stewardship Commission and transferring its functions to the SBC Executive Committee. That motion was turned down by the convention.

Since that time, Price said, the Committee of Fifteen has changed the direction of its efforts. "Instead of taking a lot of piece-meal recommendations to the convention for action, we decided to complete the entire study and refer many of these matters of concern to agency trustees for their own consideration and action," he added.

The last of the 22 recommendations to be presented to the SBC Executive Committee in February suggests another major re-evaluation of the denomination's national structure "at the beginning of the decade of the 1980's."

The Committee of Fifteen is made up of eight ordained men and seven unordained.

The 97 "areas of concern" identified by the committee include a wide variety of conditions and circumstances, programs and patterns of work by the SBC agencies, plus needs and expressed interests among the 12 million Southern Baptists. These matters will be referred directly to the appropriate agencies or the SBC Executive Committee, Price said.

The report was released well in advance of the February meeting on instructions from the SBC Executive Committee to allow ample time for thorough study by all interested groups, Price stated.

The preface to the report calls attention to both gains and losses experienced by Southern Baptists in the period, 1958-73.

In this 15-year span, SBC church membership rose 31 per cent to 12,067,284, there was a net increase of 3,036 churches and baptisms reached an all-time high of 445,725 in 1972.

The committee points out that in these same years gifts through the denomination's unified budget, the Cooperative Program, rose 113 per cent to \$91,538,458 in 1972, and total gifts climbed 155 per cent reaching \$1 billion for the first time in 1972.

Total assets of the SBC agencies increased 209 per cent during the 15 years and now amount to \$564,661,604. This does not include assets of the state conventions or local churches.

The committee likewise underscored some losses: Sunday School enrolment, which slipped from an all-time high of 7,671,165 in 1964 to 7,141,453 in 1971. Brotherhood enrolment was down from 634,651 in 1963 to 451,538 in 1971. Both showed slight gains in 1972. Church Training and Woman's Missionary Union enrolment likewise has declined.

In view of this mixed pattern of gains and losses, the Committee of Fifteen concludes with both optimism and caution.

"In all of this," the report says in its conclusion, "we note that many Baptist churches still remain strong and optimistic. Though there has been some loss in organizational enrolments, the core of the churches has pressed on to higher levels of dedication and loyalty."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This wrapup is the first of four articles on the Committee of Fifteen report. The others will follow on January 4, 8 and 10.

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U.S. Senate Calls Nation to
Humiliation, Fasting, Prayer

By W. Barry Garrett

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Senate passed without discussion and without referral to a committee a resolution to set April 30, 1974 as "a national day of humiliation, fasting and prayer."

Presumably, the matter will be taken up in the House of Representatives at an early date, although the matter was done so quickly in the Senate that no plan for House action had been formed at the time the Senate acted.

Proposed by Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R.-Ore.), the resolution was also sponsored by Senators Harold E. Hughes (D.-Iowa), Jennings Randolph (D.-W. Va.), Dewey F. Bartlett (R.-Okla.), Lawton Chiles (D.-Fla.), Paul J. Fannin (R.-Ariz.), John C. Stennis (D.-Miss.), James B. Allen (D.-Ala.), J. Bennett Johnston (D.-La.), Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.), Pete V. Domenici (R.-N.M.) and Clifford P. Hansen (R.-Wyo.).

When Hatfield introduced his resolution, he said that he wanted it referred to a Senate committee for consideration. Then in a hurried consultation with the Senate leadership, the request was made for immediate consideration. There was no objection to immediate consideration, and the resolution was passed without further discussion.

In his introductory remarks, Hatfield pointed out that the resolution "is modeled primarily after a resolution adopted in 1863 and as written by Abraham Lincoln."

Hatfield explained that "In the midst of the Civil War, the U.S. Senate requested, and Lincoln responded on three separate occasions to a resolution setting aside a day for national humiliation, fasting and prayer."

The preamble to the Hatfield resolution proclaims that it is the duty of nations to acknowledge their dependence on God, that the United States has been unusually prospered by the blessings of God, but that "we have forgotten God."

The preamble constitutes a lengthy confession of religious shortcoming on the part of the people of America.

Because of the spiritual failure of the American people, the Senate resolution said, "It therefore behooves us to humble ourselves before Almighty God, to confess our national sins and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."

The enabling part of the resolution passed by the Senate follows: "Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the Congress hereby proclaims that April 30, 1974 be a national day of humiliation, fasting and prayer; and calls upon the people of our nation to humble ourselves as we see fit, before our creator to acknowledge our final dependence upon Him and to repent of our national sins."

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Baptist Coed Dies in Arab
Bombing of Jetliner in Rome

12/21/73

By Robert O'Brien
News Editor, Baptist Press

GREENBACK, Tenn. (BP)--A special kind of quiet joy--and what seemed to be a premonition of death--permeated the final few hours of life for Bonnie Presnell, one of 32 persons killed in an Arab fire bomb attack on a Pan American jetliner in Rome.

Bonnie, a 20-year-old sophomore at Hiwassee College, Madisonville, Tenn., and her cousin, Robyn Haggard, a 16-year-old junior at Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy, Seymour, Tenn., were enroute from East Tennessee to spend the Christmas holidays with Robyn's parents in Saudi Arabia.

Robyn, burns covering about 35 per cent of her body, lies in critical condition in Santa Eugenia Hospital in Rome. The prognosis is "guarded" but Robyn "is expected to recover," reports indicate.

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A Pan Am passenger, who escaped injury, talked with Bonnie at length before her unexpected death, according to Mrs. James H. Adams of Greenback, who worked with Bonnie for 12 years in Girl Scouts.

The passenger, a girl whose identity is not available, told Mrs. Adams in a phone call to the Presnells in Greenback, that Bonnie, in the hours before her death, appeared subdued and discussed the Bible and the fact that she had recently "rededicated her life to Jesus Christ and was happy to be alive."

But the passenger told Mrs. Adams: "Bonnie said more than once, 'If I had to die today I would be ready.' It was almost as if she had a premonition of death. This girl was ready to go and wanted everyone to know she had had a happy life."

"It struck me that the girl said Bonnie was subdued," Mrs. Adams commented. "The Bonnie I knew was anything but subdued. She was lively and outgoing."

Bonnie, a member of Niles Ferry Baptist Church near Greenback, "never hesitated to give her Christian testimony in a down-to-earth natural sort of way," said Mrs. Adams, a Presbyterian. "She was a very unselfish person with so much to give. She always gave of herself. She was like my own daughter."

Robyn's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Martin Haggard, both Knoxville natives, and their four other children live in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, where he is a dentist with the Arab-American Oil Company.

She had attended school in India last year but enrolled at Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy, a Southern Baptist institution, in September to be near her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Haggard of Seymour, both Southern Baptists.

The grandparents and Bonnie's mother, Mrs. Houston Presnell, said in an interview with Baptist Press, Southern Baptist Convention news service, they had great difficulty getting exact details from Rome about what happened.

Baptist Press, working through its Richmond Bureau at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, alerted Missionary W. C. Ruchti in Rome. He contacted Dr. and Mrs. Haggard, who had flown there from Saudi Arabia.

"We hadn't been able to sleep for worrying about what was happening in Rome," said Mrs. Presnell, also a member of Niles Ferry Baptist Church. "Mr. Ruchti's information about the arrival time of Bonnie's body and other details relayed to us by Baptist Press really relieved our minds. We appreciate him very much."

Ruchti, who serves as pastor of the English-language Baptist church in Rome, told the Foreign Mission Board he will continue to visit the Haggards and offer any assistance he can. Robyn is allowed no visitors because of the seriousness of her condition, he said. Mrs. Haggard, Mrs. Presnell's sister, accompanied Bonnie's body to the United States, Ruchti reported, but will return to Rome after the funeral.

Described as a "quiet and studious girl" by Harrison-Chilhowee Baptist Academy President Hubert Smothers, Robyn Haggard was excited about her visit to Saudi Arabia.

But she was even more excited about the "first snow fall she ever saw just before she left," says her grandfather. "Her eyes really glittered with excitement."

Bonnie, a student pilot who soloed two weeks before her death, "showed the most elation about her plane trip," C. B. Haggard said.

Family and friends describe Bonnie as an active girl, full of personality, excitement and ambitions. An all-county player on the Greenback High School girls' basketball team, she received the first Bonnie Presnell Award from the school's athletic association, Mrs. Adams said.

Bonnie also earned the First Class rating in Girl Scouts (equivalent to Eagle rank in Boy Scouts) when many other candidates dropped out, her scout leader added.

But what impressed those who knew her most, a friend said, "was the consistency of her testimony as a Christian--even to the end."