



FEATURES

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Pro Quarterback Doubles
As Baptist Seminarian

by Dale Helmbold

FORT WORTH (BP)--"You see such a small amount of light sometimes. But you follow it."

Neal Jeffrey of the San Diego Chargers pro football team has been following that little bit of light for a long while, more recently as a master of divinity student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Jeffrey wanted to play pro football all his life. Everything he did in athletics was toward that goal. As quarterback at Baylor University, Jeffrey led the team to the Cotton Bowl in 1974. "It was so exciting just to be there," he recalls. He was the unanimous choice for All-Southwest Conference quarterback in 1974 and set a career passing record that same year with 4,341 yards. He was the recipient of numerous sports awards and in 1975 was named collegiate Christian athlete of the year by the National Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Then his life-long dream came true. He was drafted to the San Diego Chargers after graduation.

But it has been up-hill for three years. He was released from the Chargers after six months. This could be crushing--to have a life-long ambition reached, then see it snatched away.

But Jeffrey says his Christian faith sustained him:

"I thought, 'Maybe the Lord is trying to tell me pro ball isn't what he wants for me.'" So Jeffrey began to look into business opportunities.

But then the New York Giants called. And Jeffrey had to discern if this was from the Lord and if it was an open door.

"The only thing I knew to do was to try to step through it, and if it closed, it closed. I saw that crack of light, so I decided to follow."

Jeffrey signed with the Giants, but after three weeks, he knew that wasn't the answer. He left New York, again thinking pro ball was not in the Lord's will.

The next day, San Diego called again, wanting him back on the team. The light? Jeffrey decided to take the step and signed on. He's been playing backup quarterback with San Diego for over a year.

Jeffrey doesn't necessarily want to stay in pro ball the rest of his life. That's why he's at Southwestern Seminary now. He feels theological education is the route he needs to take right now. It will take him six years to complete the three-year master of divinity program because he can only attend classes during the spring semesters. The rest of the year he is either in training or playing football.

That's just one hardship Jeffrey and his wife, Sheila, face as he plays pro ball. Because pro games are played on Sunday, Jeffrey cannot be in church on Sunday morning. But he can sometimes attend Sunday night, and Wednesday evening.

Sheila is able to be involved in church activities which helps her adjust to new surroundings and people. But Jeffrey says, "It's hard on a wife to move everything to San Diego for six months, then to Fort Worth for six months, then back again--for six years."

Jeffrey says he has many opportunities to share his Christian testimony. But, "I really don't have that many more opportunities than the average Christian businessman. Every Christian who works in the secular world sees and knows men who apparently have everything but are lacking the essential ingredient of Jesus Christ in their lives."

The Chargers have a Bible study with about eight who usually attend. Sometimes non-Christians come, Jeffrey says, which gives the men an opportunity to reach out.

"It's hard to break through the hard exterior many players have," he notes: "Because Americans tend to idolize athletes, the athletes have trouble admitting to weaknesses and needs. So it's hard for even a teammate to get through to them and really talk deeply with them."

The Christian athletes are trying though. A Pro Athlete Outreach has been formed with the intention of bringing all Christian athletes together in an attempt to reach out to non-Christians, Jeffrey cites.

"Athletes are not supermen," he emphasizes: "They just happen to have a talent that Americans are enamored with. But they have the same needs and frustrations and joys as all men."

-30-

Dale Helmbold is a student news writer for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth.

(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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Texas Baptists Blast
Pari-Mutuel Measure

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DALLAS (BP)--The Texas Baptists executive board struck a sledgehammer blow here at a pari-mutuel gambling bill (H.B. 1499) introduced the same day in the Texas House of Representatives by Laredo Representative Billy Hall.

Almost simultaneously, at its quarterly meeting in Dallas, the 192-member executive board said, "We are sick and tired of a few legislators trying to convince the entire state government that it should evade its responsibility by allowing local option elections on gambling."

Among its reasons for opposing pari-mutuel gambling the board cited regressive taxes, corruption of public officials, increase in organized crime and wealthy sportsmen capitalizing on the misfortunes of the poor.

The board, which urged Texas Baptists to call and write elected officials, also directed the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission to make available to Texas Baptist churches specific information on positions taken by legislators on gambling and "any action they take which promotes gambling.

"We are fed up with exaggerated claims of gambling revenues when national studies flatly contradict such claims," added which represents two million Texas Baptists in some 4,000 Southern Baptist churches.

Citing Texans for their wisdom in voting down other proposals to legalize gambling, the board said, "That wisdom must be reflected in the decisions of this legislature. We cannot allow gross manipulation of government to serve the pocketbooks of a few special interests."

Texas Baptists charged that "any move for a statewide vote would confirm that the gambling interests' current frantic appeals for funds have failed" and that "the vast sums of money necessary for a statewide campaign would surely come from questionable sources outside the state."

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Singer Co. Relents,
Re-Offers Bryant TV Show

Baptist Press
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MIAMI BEACH (BP)--Entertainer Anita Bryant, who lost a potentially lucrative television contract because of her highly publicized opposition to passage of a Miami Metro homosexual rights ordinance, has been offered the job again.

Spokesmen for her and the Singer Company, chief sponsor for the show, said negotiations have been resumed with Bryant to be hostess for a pilot program of a 13-week long TV talk show series to be aired in the fall.

The telegram cancelling negotiations with Bryant two weeks earlier cited "the extensive national publicity arising from the controversial political activities" she had engaged in. "We want this to be a pleasant show," said Edward Trevorow, vice president of Singer, when negotiations were broken off. "We'd like to have as little difficulty as possible in any direction," he said.

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However, Singer officials said the earlier decision had not been cleared with top management. Singer executive vice president W. Paul Tippet Jr. said Singer fully supports Bryant's rights to take a personal position on legitimate issues "not related to her commercial environment with the company."

A company spokesman said the Singer Company has received a lot of phone calls and letters about the cancellation. He would not say whether most of those phone calls were opposed to the action, but, he insisted, "This wasn't the reason for the change."

Bryant, a Southern Baptist, was one of the leaders of a petition drive to try to force repeal of the ordinance passed by the Metro Commission earlier this year that would outlaw discrimination against homosexuals.

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TV Film on Christ
Causes Some Stir

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3/11/77

FORT WORTH (BP)--A six-hour film entitled "The Life of Christ," scheduled to be sponsored by General Motors on NBC-TV during the Easter season, has become controversial in some quarters, although little is known about the film to date, according to a Southern Baptist communications executive.

Paul M. Stevens, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, Fort Worth, who will attend a pre-screening of the film to determine its content, said he has received a large number of contacts concerning the film and quoting remarks reportedly made by G. Franco Zeffirelli, the film's director.

Stevens has written to Herbert S. Schlosser, president of the National Broadcasting Company, expressing concern about its content and seeking to learn precisely the nature of the film and NBC-TV's plans for it.

A newsletter put out by the Moody Adams Association in Baker, La., quotes "Faith" magazine as saying, "Director Zeffirelli told a news magazine reporter, 'I . . . see Jesus as an ordinary man, gentle, fragile, simple . . . Of course, the public is going to be annoyed that I am destroying their myths . . . yet in view of the constant reinterpretation of Jesus' life and the tone of our contemporary society, I believe the changes which I have made are valid.'"

In his letter to Schlosser, Stevens said of Zeffirelli, "If his statements concerning his treatment of the deity of Christ are true, then they reveal a foolish insensitivity to the feelings and convictions of more than 85 million Americans.

"I think the result will be a reaction unlike any that has been heretofore experienced," Stevens told Schlosser. "In my opinion the present national attitude toward religion will resist a presentation that reflects on deity of Christ."

The screening of "The Life of Christ" is scheduled by NBC-TV in New York City for March 25. Stevens and others have been invited to see for themselves whether the film downgrades the deity of Christ.

People Follow Dollars,
Churches Follow People

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By Carol Franklin

WASHINGTON (BP)--Population migration in the United States in the near future will probably follow the federal dollar, according to a demographic expert from the U. S. Bureau of the Census.

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Speaking to a class in "The City and Urbanization" at the Center for Urban Studies of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary located in the nation's capital, Larry H. Long of the population division of the Bureau of the Census briefed seminarians and pastors on current trends in population shifts.

Long told the seminarians, "Since 1950 the population has tended to move in the direction of federal spending. Historically, the South and the West have received more than they have sent to Washington, while the North has sent more than it has received.

Military installations, power plants, dams--all have been built in the South and West where the population is now growing," he said. "Power encourages industry, recreation facilities encourage population migration. Overall, the effect of federal spending on population is going to be even more significant in the future," Long asserted.

Long also noted a decline in urban populations which the census bureau has been following since it was first recorded in August of 1973. "There are decreased inducements to move to cities," Long told his audience. "People are staying put, closer to where they were born. Whites are also moving out of cities in most places. The overall decline is very small but it is present and it probably will continue."

Thomas Bland, professor of ethics and sociology at Southeastern Seminary, who commutes weekly from Wake Forest, N. C., to Washington for classes at the urban center, explained his reasoning in inviting Long to speak to his class.

"We are trying to understand the urban context in which Christian ministry and mission happen today," he said. "We want to pull together the fruits of the labors of lots of folk--demographers, urban sociologists, planners of city and regional planning--under the scrutiny of theologically sensitive and culturally acute persons. We will sift all data to determine what this says to the church and the Christian mission in our kind of world."

Bland conceded that the sociological data his classes receive "probably won't help in next Sunday's sermon but it will help the church be one of the shapers of life in our time rather than to react to social forces after they have already set the pattern.

"Our Baptist folk are interested in people, all kinds of people--inner city, suburban, exurban, rural. We want our ministers to follow up by learning all we can about who people are, where people live, and where they are migrating to and from so we know where we need to minister," Bland continued.

"All of our students at the Center for Urban Studies have a sense of personal involvement in coming to terms with the complexity of urban life. Washington is a laboratory where sociological theory, census data, and the social and psychological dimensions of life in a modern city can be studied against the backdrop of the Christian gospel and the Christian ethic of vital concern for all people," Bland emphasized.