



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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78-40

Missionary, Teens, Ready
To Fight New York Court

By Everett Hullum

BUFFALO, N. Y. (BP)--A Southern Baptist missionary and area teenagers are headed for an April showdown on the constitutionality of Bible clubs in high schools.

Byron Lutz, an inner-city missionary in Buffalo, is fighting on behalf of students who attend his teen center for permission to establish voluntary Bible clubs in three Buffalo high schools.

According to a report in the April issue of Home Missions magazine, Lutz and the students were denied their petition in January. Should New York's highest court uphold that denial, Lutz and the group's attorney, Michael J. Brown, promise to carry the suit to the U. S. Supreme Court, which has never ruled on voluntary religious exercise in schools, according to Brown.

On four separate occasions, Brown said, the court has declared unconstitutional "state required or state inspired and mandated prayer or religious instruction."

"Unfortunately, most people have taken those cases and decided the Supreme Court has outlawed anything to do with God or religion," he said.

The suit brought by Lutz and the students will ask the courts to resolve the question of voluntary religious participation in schools. Brown said, "What we propose (in the Bible clubs) is something the state has no involvement in. It is not required of anyone, either students or sponsors. It is merely a voluntary activity of a student in his or her free time in an unused part of the school."

In his January decision, New York Supreme Court Justice Norman Stiller said, "No persuasive reason is given how school property supported and maintained with public funds can be lawfully used for religious purposes."

Brown, a Catholic layman and member of the Christian Legal Society, argued in the suit--*Trietley et al vs. Board of Education of City of Buffalo*--that non-mandatory participation in religious-oriented clubs is constitutional. Trietley, named in the suit, is one of the students who attend Sycamore Tree, a youth center run by Lutz.

The suit grew from Lutz's failure to secure permission from the Buffalo school board for the students to hold Bible clubs before or after school. Several students already had enlisted teacher sponsors and had begun daily studies when the school board informed a principal the practice was illegal.

Lutz carried the students' request to the board of education, promising the clubs would be voluntary, held before or after official school hours, student-led and interdenominational. He argued the clubs "would be an asset to the school in providing moral and spiritual assistance to the students."

When the board rejected his plea, Lutz contacted the Christian Legal Society. Believing the constitutional issue worth pursuing, the society referred Lutz to Brown, who accepted the case without fee. Contributions have covered all other expenses.

Lutz has received "overwhelming community support," he said. "If we had been trying the case in the newspapers or on public opinion, we'd have won in a landslide."

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"The bishop of my (Catholic) diocese has written and called to state his support and assured us he will help us get state-wide and perhaps national support," Brown said. He and Lutz have appeared on numerous talk shows and on cable television.

Lutz said his most vocal opposition has been from other Southern Baptists, who have misunderstood the church-state separation issues. Baptists traditionally have championed church-state separation. But Lutz said his suit did not attempt to establish any state-supported religious program.

Brown said the U. S. Supreme Court "emphasized that there is no constitutional prohibition against the public school accommodation of the religious interests of the students.

"In short, while the United States Constitution prohibits the establishment of religion, it does not prohibit its accommodation. What is sought (in our case) is merely accommodation."

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Money-Saving Computer
List Ready August 1

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DALLAS (BP)--A computerized system of mailing lists that will save Southern Baptist agencies thousands of dollars by eliminating duplicate lists will be in operation by August 1.

The new system, operated and maintained by the Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., was revealed at a business session of the Southern Baptist Computer Users Association in Dallas.

"The system also will enlarge the capacity of the Sunday School Board's services, enabling it to provide more specialized and selective types of mailing lists than were available to our agencies in the past," explained Van Simpson, manager of the board's systems department.

He said the Sunday School Board can now supply very specialized lists. "Suppose, for example, an agency wants a mailing list containing only the names of Georgia pastors in churches with 500 or fewer members," Simpson explained. "With the new system, we can supply the list."

In other action, the computer association voted to continue its buying committee's investigation into the possibility of Southern Baptist agencies joining in the volume purchase of stock paper and custom forms for computer use, an action that could result in substantial savings.

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Atlanta Hotels
Filling Swiftly

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3/17/78

ATLANTA (BP)--Hotel and motel rooms in downtown Atlanta are filling quickly for the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.

SBC sessions will be held at the Georgia World Congress Center, June 13-15, with a number of satellite meetings scheduled to begin June 11 and another one set for June 16.

The Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau said 6,972 hotel/motel rooms within the central city of Atlanta have been committed for SBC use. As of March 15, 4,057 of those rooms were taken.

The SBC Housing Bureau said that as of March 15, every person seeking a room for the SBC received first choice of hotel. If the first, second or third choices are not available, the housing bureau assigns rooms comparable in quality and price to the hotel of their first choice if possible.

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Persons attending the SBC who do not make their own reservations may write for reservations to the SBC Housing Bureau, 233 Peachtree St., N. E., according to Bernard D. King, coordinator of local arrangements.

He said that as of March 15, eight hotels were sold out. They are Atlanta American, Central Travelodge, White House Motor Inn, Holiday Inn Downtown, Holiday Inn Monroe Drive, Howard Johnson, Northeast, Hyatt Regency and Inntown Motel.

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Beirut School Remains
Open Despite Anxiety

By Ruth Fowler

Baptist Press
3/17/78

BEIRUT, Lebanon (BP)--The mood was tense and faces were firm as students and teachers at the Beirut Baptist School continued classes under threat that the school might be closed or come under direct attack.

On March 15 Israeli forces launched an attack on Southern Lebanon in retaliation for a bus bombing in Israel. The attack, though centered in Tyre, moved to Beirut proper for part of the conflict. The fear of attack was coupled with the anxiety that refugees may be quartered in the Beirut school, which would close down regular classes.

The hundreds, perhaps thousands, left homeless are being quartered by Lebanese military forces in vacant building. Soldiers came to the Beirut Baptist School March 16 when classes were out in observance of the anniversary of the death of a Lebanese political leader.

James K. Ragland, Southern Baptist missionary director of the school, chose to resume classes March 17 rather than face possible closure for the quartering of refugees.

The school remained open throughout the war in Beirut in 1975-77 and this year has the highest enrollment in its history. But at least half of the school's more than 600 students were absent on the first day after the Israeli bombing.

A dynamite blast from a building site frightened both students and teachers. One mother ran to the school afraid for the lives of her children. "If we die," she told Ragland, "we die together."

As one of the other students went after the woman's son, she sat wringing her hands. Gently her son, more than a foot taller than his mother, looked down and wiped her tears from her cheeks, assuring her the school had not been hit. School was not out yet but Ragland allowed the student and his younger brother to leave with their mother.

More parents came as the afternoon progressed. "Anytime they are separated from one another there is this worry," Mrs. Ragland said. "They fear for each other's safety."

But with all of this tension and fear, studies go on. "The students have hope," Mrs. Ragland explained. "We have hope too that we can teach at least some that in Jesus there is peace and love."

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Baptists Helping
Terrorist Victims

By Elizabeth Smith

Baptist Press
3/17/78

JERUSALEM, Israel (BP)--Baptists in Israel are using prayer and friendship to help the grieving families around them who suffered losses in the recent terrorist attack.

Some Southern Baptist representatives and other Baptists who live in the coastal plain were under curfew for more than 24 hours following the attack March 11 in which 33 Israeli citizens were killed and scores wounded. But now they are free to travel and help where they can.

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When news came of the Israeli defense forces' military action in Southern Lebanon March 14-16, one Baptist in Haifa had a special reason to remain close to his radio and television for reports. Ibrahim Sim'an, lay evangelist, said, "I have made 16,000 friends in that area over the past two years. I am anxious to learn about the welfare of each one. This has been a nerve-wracking two days for me."

Sim'an has been coordinating relief work among the refugees from Southern Lebanon. This ministry began shortly after the Israeli government established the "good fence" policy in January 1976 in an effort to alleviate the suffering of the villagers caught in the civil strife in that area of Lebanon.

"After things clear up a bit, I hope to return to the four border crossings to continue giving aid to anyone in need, strictly on a humanitarian basis with no military or political connection," Sim'an stressed. He sees no reason for his help to both Christian and Muslim Arabs to cease.

Sim'an makes regular trips to the border in his minibus to distribute supplies such as blankets, foodstuffs, cement, lanterns and medical needs. He also helps transport the sick and wounded to hospitals in several cities in Galilee.

Funds from Baptists and other concerned Christian individuals and groups in Israel and abroad are used in this ministry.

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Elizabeth (Mrs. James W.) Smith is Southern Baptist press representative for Israel.

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Southern Baptists
Lead ABS Giving

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--With 1977 gifts totaling \$251,908, Southern Baptists contributed 16.3 percent of the denominational gifts received by the American Bible Society according to the society's year end statistics.

The total for Southern Baptists, who have led the nation's religious denominations in contributions to the ABS for 12 of the past 13 years, was \$23,722 less than they gave in 1976.

The next largest denominational gift to the ABS in 1977 was the \$111,009 received from the United Methodist Church. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod contributed \$108,618.

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New Bible Book Series
Introduced in Texas, D. C.

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
3/17/78

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptist church and Sunday School leaders responded positively to the systematic Bible study method of the new Bible Book Series curriculum during recent premiere meetings in Fort Worth and Austin, Texas, and Washington, D. C.

Bible Book Series, available on Oct. 1, 1978, is a new Sunday School curriculum published by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board in Nashville, Tenn., which will study all 66 books of the Bible during a nine year period.

The premiere meetings, the first of nearly 60 scheduled around the country before June 1, presented comparisons of objectives, study methods, teaching resources and use of scriptures between Bible Book Series and the two existing Bible study curriculum series, Convention Uniform and Life and Work.

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In the Fort Worth meeting, more than 250 persons received sample lessons and asked questions concerning the new curriculum series. Many indicated they planned to change to the new series because they preferred its systematic, book by book study of the entire Bible.

Others said they would continue to use Life and Work or Convention Uniform to take advantage of additional teacher helps available in the existing series. Educational procedures between the three series will be different, with the intention of giving churches a clear choice of which to choose.

In Bible Book Series, the educational approach majors on content, with application to life situations taken only as it grows naturally out of the Bible text. Since content is the key factor, both youth and adults will study the same Bible passages each Sunday. In Life and Work and Convention Uniform, adults and youth study different passages.

In Convention Uniform, the educational approach focuses on understanding the meaning of a selected Bible passage and its relevance for youth or adults. The Life and Work Series emphasizes the meaning of a Bible passage and applies the biblical message to church and individual needs.

Some persons felt the Bible Book Series would put more pressure on teachers because of the content approach instead of obvious application to life situations. Designers of the new series from the Sunday School department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, said numerous application to life situations are expected to grow naturally out of the Bible text, since the Bible is the inspired word of God.

Lee Porter, Sunday School Board consultant, said in response to a question on the availability of teacher aids, that helps to compliment the new series were a strong possibility. But the only additional product now scheduled is a quarterly commentary, available in April 1979, to accompany the Bible Book Series.

Texts used in the Bible Book Series will be printed from the King James Version, with other translations used occasionally in the lesson comments. The Convention Uniform Series prints the King James Version in the periodicals but uses a variety of translations and paraphrases in the lesson comments. Lesson comments in the Life and Work Series are based on a contemporary translation. Learners are encouraged to use their own Bibles as they study in all courses.

Asked why the new series did not study the Bible from front to back, Porter said it would take nearly seven years to complete the Old Testament using that method. He said series designers felt Southern Baptists would prefer to study some out of each testament each year.

Bible Book Series will provide one periodical for all youth and one periodical for all adult members, plus teacher quarterlies for both ages. Separate periodicals for different focus ages of youth and adults are provided in the Convention Uniform and Life Work Series, along with separate pupil and teacher periodicals.