



BAPTIST PRESS

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September 7, 1978

78-145

Spiritual Revival Exists
Despite Political Tensions

By Stanley Stamps and Jennifer Hall

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Despite uncertainty and tension brought on by political and terrorist activities, Baptist churches in Nicaragua are experiencing a spiritual revival.

"The people don't know whom to believe," says Donatilo Garachi, national evangelism promoter for the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua. "The gospel is the only thing that gives them someone real in whom they can deposit their faith."

Through the years there has been an increased emphasis on evangelism in the Baptist churches in Nicaragua and a growing consciousness by church members of personal evangelism, notes Garachi. But he says a spiritual vacuum exists, caused by the unsettled political situation.

Those elements combined, says Garachi, explains a record 800 baptisms which he estimates the 43 Baptist churches in the convention will register this year. He also notes formation of prayer groups, professions of faith in many churches, and good attendance at worship services.

Southern Baptist missionaries in Managua have maintained normal activities during recent weeks of strikes, political disturbances and terrorist activities throughout the country. The missionaries have experienced no restrictions and little inconvenience, even during the terrorist assault on the national palace.

The assault was carried out by a communist movement--the Sandinista National Liberation Front--which has engaged in guerrilla activities against the national guard, seeking to overthrow the government of President Anastasio Somoza and set up a Marxist regime.

Hundreds of people were held captive during the assault. Southern Baptist missionaries N. Hoyt and Marie Eudaly were told that the daughter of a neighbor was among the hostages. At the request of the family, the Eudalys counseled and prayed with the family.

A general strike was supported by several political parties which oppose Somoza and seek his overthrow.

Normal economic activity has been sharply reduced. The Baptist Cultural Center (bookstore and wholesale book deposit) has remained open and continues to attend customers despite the strike which paralyzed 50 percent of the capital city's commerce. Sales volume of Bibles, books and periodical literature has been reduced because of the economic decline.

Although the ministry of the Baptist Cultural Center has not been interrupted, some church and denominational meetings have been called off or rescheduled to avoid unnecessary exposure to unexpected incidents. Evangelical churches and church groups have not been singled out as the objectives of any terrorist activity or opposition reprisals, but church leaders have adopted a cautious attitude.

Garachi and the National Committee of Evangelism and Missions are going ahead with plans for a revival campaign in November, when more than 20 Southern Baptist pastors and evangelists (most bilingual) will participate in special evangelistic efforts in 44 churches and missions. Another evangelistic crusade will take place in February.

SEARCHED INDEXED
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SEP 11 1978
FBI - NASHVILLE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Dinitz Pledges Effort
To Clarify Israeli Law

By Stan Hastey

WASHINGTON (BP)--A group of Baptist leaders expressed optimism that Israel's law forbidding Christians or others from offering "material benefit" for Israelis to convert to another faith will be clarified in the near future.

Their views came in the wake of a meeting with the Israeli ambassador to the United States on the eve of the historic peace summit convened at Camp David between Israel's Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

During the one and one-half hour meeting, Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz pledged to "put all my weight" behind efforts to stop harassment of Christians in Israel adversely affected by the law. He promised to work with highly-placed Israeli officials to seek clarification of the law's intent.

Dinitz also suggested that the Baptist group meet with him periodically to discuss any future abuses of the law.

The Baptist group included James E. Wood Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs; Jimmy R. Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of the First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas; Robert C. Campbell, general secretary of the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.; J. D. Hughey, secretary for Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia for the SBC Foreign Mission Board; William F. Keucher, pastor of the Covenant Baptist Church (American Baptist), Detroit, Mich.; and Melvin G. Cooper, executive director of the State Ethics Commission of Alabama.

The law in question was adopted earlier this year by the Israeli Knesset and took effect on April 1, 1978. It declares: "Whosoever gives or promises to a person money, money's worth or some other material benefit in order to induce him to change his religion or in order that he may induce another person to change his religion is liable to imprisonment for five years or a fine of 50,000 pounds."

The law goes on to make it a criminal action as well for any person to receive money or other material benefit in return for a promise to change one's religion. The penalty for violation of that prohibition is a term of three years in prison or a fine of 30,000 pounds.

Baptists and other Christians, both inside and outside Israel, have persistently raised questions and registered misgivings about the new law since its passage, fearful that it would be interpreted as giving local officials sufficient leverage to persecute Christians and prevent them from engaging in ministries to people which might be interpreted as offering material inducement for conversion.

Several reports from Israel in recent months indicate that in some instances local officials have reacted in just that way. The result has been a growing protest both inside Israel and around the world against the Israeli law.

Due to Israel's historic and staunch defense of religious liberty, the new law caught Christians around the world off guard and has resulted in ill will toward Israel from quarters where the Jewish state has always before been hailed and defended.

During his conference with the Baptist group, Dinitz spoke to this facet of the problem, saying that he had hoped the meeting could have taken place earlier, thereby avoiding some of what the ambassador called the "bad blood" which has flowed between Christians and Jews over the new law.

The ambassador said further that Israeli society "will not tolerate...religious harassment... of any kind." Such a posture would be "unthinkable," he said, for a people who have themselves suffered persecution throughout history.

Among groups protesting the Knesset's action have been the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Southern Baptist Convention. At its semiannual meeting last March, the Washington-based Baptist Joint Committee named a committee of three, chaired by SBC

President Allen, along with Keucher and Cooper, to work with Wood in coordinating Baptist concern over the law. Because of the ambassador's hectic schedule in recent months, the gathering was repeatedly delayed.

"While we may rightly lament the existence of such a law in Israel or anywhere else," Wood said, "we are hopeful that at least there may be some resolution with regard to the ambiguities of the present anti-conversion law so as to improve interfaith relations as well as the climate of human rights and religious liberty in the state of Israel."

Although acknowledging that it would be "wrong...to interpret the law as essentially 'anti-Christian'," Wood went on to say that "in actual practice...it is assumed that the law is directed primarily against certain Christian mission efforts in Israel."

He emphasized that Baptists, too, condemn outright bribes or material inducements for conversion but object nevertheless to the "sweeping provisions" of the law.

Wood, who along with others in the Baptist delegation has been known for his support of Israel and opposition to anti-Semitism, pointed out that his agency "has recognized the Jewish community in America as among our strongest allies in the defense of religious liberty. We are all the more concerned, therefore," he concluded, "that the civil liberties of Christian groups in Israel not be compromised..."

Allen, equally hopeful, said the group was "pleased that the ambassador expressed a common concern for the misunderstanding of the law in the perception of Israel's image in the world."

The SBC president went on to declare that "the future of Israel's religious liberty both in fact and in image will be at stake in the efforts of Israeli officials to address themselves constructively to this problem during the coming months."

Campbell, chief executive officer of the 1.5-million-member American Baptist Churches, praised the Israeli ambassador for listening and responding "forthrightly and creatively" and for avoiding "the circuitous rhetoric of 'meddling in a nation's internal affairs'." Campbell said he anticipates "Israeli action and a consequent enrichment of Christian-Jewish relations."

Hughey, the SBC Foreign Mission Board's chief expert on missions in the Middle East, also commended Dinitz's "cordiality and friendliness...his willingness to listen to us, and the honest and understanding way in which he spoke."

"I was reassured by his declaration that Israeli society will not tolerate denials of religious liberty and by his expressed willingness to use his influence on behalf of true freedom," Hughey said.

Dinitz told the Baptist leaders that the problem was two-fold: the law itself and perceptions of the meaning of the law. He acknowledged that during debate over the new measure in the Knesset statements were made which he labeled "unacceptable," "untenable," and "wrong."

Noting that numerous prominent individual Jews and Jewish organizations in the United States have condemned the law, Dinitz said, "I would have been upset" if they had failed to react with concern. He also pointed out that the law has been sharply criticized within Israel itself.

Although he promised to pass along to Israeli officials the Baptists' suggestion that the law either be repealed or amended, Dinitz told the group that the method most likely to succeed would be clarifying the intent of the law and seeking to curb the activities of those who have reacted to the measure with excessive zeal.

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Carter, Begin, Sadat
Issue Call To Prayer

Baptist Press
9/7/78

CAMP DAVID, Md. (BP)--U.S. President Jimmy Carter, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel have issued a joint call to prayer for peace in the Middle East.

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Issued from Camp David, Md., where the three leaders are meeting to find a workable solution to the tensions between Israel and the Arab states surrounding it, the call to prayer says:

"Conscious of the grave issues which face us, we place our trust in the God of our fathers, from whom we seek wisdom and guidance. As we meet here at Camp David, we request people of all faiths to pray with us that peace and justice will result from these deliberations."

Robert S. Denny, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, Washington, D.C., has sent cables to all regional presidents and vice presidents of the BWA urging them to notify Baptists in their parts of the world to pray for the Middle East peace effort. He has also encouraged them to ask that letters and cables be sent to the White House indicating prayer support of Baptists.

Carter has also proclaimed Oct. 7, 1978, as a National Day of Prayer. This was done in compliance with a resolution approved by Congress in 1952 calling on the president to set aside one day each year for national prayer.

"Today we face challenges equal to any in our history," Carter's proclamation said. "Few generations have been given such opportunities for good or ill on earth. We approach our responsibility confidently, but with sobering awareness that God's sea is very great and our ship, infinitely small."

He continued, "I ask all Americans to join with me on (October 7) in asking God's help that we may see and understand our responsibilities and discharge them with wisdom, strength, and patience."

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Church Collects Bond
To Free 'Changed' Man

Baptist Press
9/7/78

ATLANTA (BP)--Mosie Alfred Harriell arrived at the courthouse aboard a school bus with 40 other chained men.

But Harriell, alias Charlie Harris, knew that with the help of Oakhurst Baptist Church, he soon would be free.

Convicted of killing a policeman 35 years ago in Wabash, Ind., Harris had served 25 years of a life prison sentence before escaping to Atlanta 10 years ago. He was recently discovered and jailed.

When the congregation read in a local newspaper that Harris has lived with a clean record since his escape, they considered him somewhat a changed man and offered their \$200,000 building as security for a \$30,000 bond for his release.

The court clerk stalled on the church's offer, fearing community outrage if the county called the bond and took the church building.

So the 250-member congregation collected \$400 in a special offering to make up the difference between what friends and neighbors had collected and the \$750 needed for a bail bondsman, who had offered to accept half his normal fee to provide bail.

Harris had to wait hours for the bonding company official to accept the money, but finally he was freed, leaving the courthouse to resume his job as a carpenter and his life with his wife Sara.

Asked if he was planning to "take a vacation" by a local television station reporter, Harris answered "No. Where could I go? The whole world has seen my picture now."

Harris will remain free on bail pending appeal of the extradition order signed by Georgia Governor George Busbee.

In the meantime, Oakhurst has not forgotten him. Members have begun gathering signatures on petitions to the governor requesting that Harris, because of the time already served and his long clean record in Atlanta, be allowed to remain free.

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SEP. 8 1978