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Baptist Agency Attacks IRS School Proposal

By Stan Hasteay

WASHINGTON (BP)--A proposal by the Internal Revenue Service to require church-related schools to prove they are racially nondiscriminatory or risk the loss of their tax exemption amounts to a "direct affront" to the First Amendment, a Baptist agency in Washington charged.

The Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, which represents eight U. S. Baptist bodies with a combined membership of nearly 27 million persons, joined numerous other religious groups covering virtually the entire religious spectrum in opposing the proposal first announced in August. The Baptist Joint Committee urged the IRS to abandon the plan.

When the proposed revenue procedure announcement was made in the "Federal Register," it was accompanied by a note that IRS did not consider the matter sufficiently "significant" to merit a public hearing. After the proposal was made public, however, IRS was inundated by a flood of protest and announced a one-day hearing for Dec. 5.

With objections continuing to pour in, IRS hurriedly expanded the length of the hearings, first to three, and finally to four full days, with some 250 witnesses from across the nation scheduled to be heard.

The Baptist Joint Committee testimony, delivered by Executive Director James E. Wood Jr., declared, "Anything short of exempting church-related and church-operated schools from coverage by these and other similar procedures, rulings, and regulations will not cure the serious church-state constitutional problems which are inherent in them."

Wood emphasized that while the Baptist Joint Committee "commend(s) efforts on the part of government to eliminate racial discrimination in public-financed education," it nevertheless opposes the proposed procedure on church-state grounds.

"The fundamental issue which is raised by the proposed revenue procedure," the statement went on, "is religious liberty and the separation of church and state rather than the furtherance of a meritorious public policy of abolishing racial discrimination."

More specifically, the testimony called attention to the landmark three-part test repeatedly enunciated by the U. S. Supreme Court in determining the limitations on laws or regulations relating to religion. In a 1971 decision, the high court held that the law must have a "secular legislative purpose," must have a primary effect which "neither advances nor inhibits religion," and must not foster an "excessive government entanglement with religion."

Although granting that the IRS proposal may well meet the first test by having a secular purpose, the Baptist Joint Committee insisted that it fails the other two tests.

On the primary effect test, "the threat of losing a statutory grant if a constitutional right is acted upon is manifestly chilling and, therefore, has the effect of substantially inhibiting the churches in what they conceive to be their religious mission," the statement declared.

Regarding excessive government entanglement with religion, Wood warned that if IRS implements the proposal "a process would be set in motion" which would inevitably entangle the IRS in church affairs.

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The testimony also denounced the proposal's requirement that church schools must repeatedly prove they are nondiscriminatory by admitting a set quota of minority students. Wood called attention to the Supreme Court's decision earlier this year in the case of Allan Bakke, the white medical school applicant ordered admitted to the University of California--Davis because of that school's unconstitutional quota system for admitting students from various minority groups.

By requiring church-related schools to prove year after year that they do not discriminate racially requires "the almost impossible task of proving a negative," the statement continued.

Along with many other religious groups which oppose the proposed procedure, the Baptist Joint Committee has found itself in the uncomfortable position of siding with officials of church-related elementary and secondary schools created primarily to escape "secular humanism" in the public schools. The Baptist agency has historically been a strong supporter of the public school system.

In addition, some of the protesting schools were created to avoid the integration of public schools. Taking notice of that fact, the Baptist Joint Committee testimony declared that while such schools' admission and enrollment policies may be "reprehensible to many outside their religious communities," the IRS attempt to control them by threatening the loss of tax exemption nevertheless constitute a "flagrant violation" of the First Amendment.

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Missionaries Remain in Iran;
No General Evacuation Planned

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12/7/78

TEHERAN, Iran (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in the strife-torn country of Iran are continuing their ministries, including regular worship services and the morning presentation of a Christmas cantata.

James F. Kirkendall, Southern Baptist missionary field representative for South Asia, reported by phone Dec. 7 that missionaries were going about usual church activities and visitation during the day and staying in their homes at night, when many of the anti-Shah demonstrations occur.

A Southern Baptist volunteer, Hubert Williams, will return home with employees of an American company. Other missionary personnel will continue as usual.

Kirkendall emphasized that Americans leaving Iran are doing so voluntarily and not under instructions of the American embassy.

Americans were being advised to stay close at home Dec. 10-11 when Kirkendall said the worst violence was expected.

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Senate Must Ratify SALT
For National Security

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WASHINGTON (BP)--Failure by the U. S. Senate to ratify the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) agreement now being negotiated would cause the "gravest danger to national security I can imagine," a former United Nations ambassador said.

Charles Yost, co-chairman of Americans for SALT and a former career officer in the United States Foreign Service, told the Council of Washington Representatives on the United Nations that the "absence of agreement (on SALT) would have disastrous effects."

Yost cited two consequences of failure to ratify the SALT agreement--removal of all limitation on the strategic arms race with a rapid build-up of weapons and an immediate increase of tension between the United States and Russia.

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Yost also predicted that defense spending would "skyrocket" if the Senate did not ratify the arms agreement.

Speaking about the fear of many citizens that Russia will take advantage of any weakness they perceive in the U. S., Yost said that the chance of a first strategic nuclear strike against the U. S. by Soviet Premier Brezhnev or any likely successor is "virtually nil."

Yost said the Russians know they would lose many people in any U. S. retaliation, their industrial complex would be destroyed, and they would run the risk of losing the non-Russian states now part of the Soviet Union.

"Utter stupidity and recklessness are not qualities that (the Russians) have exhibited," Yost said. "Their foreign policy has been governed by great caution since the 1920's when they came to power."

Yost acknowledged that SALT II achievements would be "modest." "But it would be tragic to let our desire for the best interfere with the achievement of the good," he said.

John Holum, staff aide to U. S. Sen. George McGovern, D.-S.D., warned that the new Senate, which will convene in January, is an unknown factor in the ratification process. "SALT should be able to pass given public education and an administration effort," said Holum, who also cautioned that the Carter administration should not take any votes for granted.

Many senators, he said, dislike administration attempts to "buy off the hawks" with arms sales around the world. He hinted that McGovern might be among those senators who vote against the treaty, despite basic agreement with its provisions, because he fears the long range cost in national security might be too great.

James E. Wood, Jr., executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, is chairman of the Washington Council of Representatives on the United Nations.

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Cothen Warns Against
Religion Without Commitment

Baptist Press
12/7/78

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Responding to projected statistical declines in enrollments, Grady Cothen expressed fear that Americans want religion without commitment.

The projections, compiled from the 1978 Uniform Church Letter by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's research services department, showed only church training and church music are expected to show enrollment gains among the program organizations in Southern Baptist churches. Total Southern Baptist membership and receipts will also rise.

"There are a bunch of folks 'born again' with no understanding of what that means, involves or requires," Cothen, the board's president, said during the annual president's luncheon hosted by the board's Bible teaching, Christian development, and church and staff support divisions and its church services and materials coordination unit.

Cothen cited four other difficulties which have an effect on Southern Baptists and the Bold Mission Thrust goal to proclaim the message of Christ to the entire world in this century. They are: the spirit of sacrifice lost from American life, the work ethic ideal replaced with the spirit of entitlement, the secularization of America, and the lack of ministering to the cities.

"It's still abundantly clear after reviewing the 1978 statistics that we're losing the cities and we must come to grips with it," Cothen said. "People have the same spiritual hunger and the same spiritual needs regardless of their race or background and Southern Baptists have the responsibility to describe and implement ways to reach the cities with the gospel of Christ."

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In his final remarks, Cothen said demonic powers are using secularization, the leeching out of the work ethic, religion without ethics and religious interest without commitment against Southern Baptists' work and that it will require divine power to overcome it.

"Methodology alone will fail regardless of our energy and dedication to the cause," he said. "To succeed we must have the power from God to make operative all these good things that we're trying to do."

More than 300 people attending the luncheon included state convention staff in Sunday School, church training, family ministry and church music departments who were visiting the board for annual planning and promotion meetings.

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Her Letter Ministry Helps
Evangelize New Parents

By Erwin L. McDonald

TEXARKANA, Texas (BP)--A Texarkana housewife combines public relations with evangelism in a new outreach effort she calls "the Baby Ministry."

It started when middle-aged Mary Louise Bedsole decided she was "just a nominal Christian" and rededicated her life to Christ and his church. "I had been a Christian the most of my life," she says, "but the Lord and his church had never really been first in my life."

With her rededication, Mrs. Bedsole prayed that the Lord would give her a real challenge. Then a pastor friend suggested she write letters of congratulation to new parents and invite them to church.

That was more than three years ago. Since then, more than 5,000 letters have gone out, and scores of new parents have been won to Christ by telephone calls that followed the letters, Mrs. Bedsole reports. And there have been countless other conversions and many rededications.

At least seven Baptist churches in the Texarkana area are now involved in the Baby Ministry, which has spread to several other states and to at least two foreign countries, New Zealand and South Korea.

Since most babies are born in hospitals and all births are a part of the public record, keeping up with the new arrivals is just a matter of reading the birth announcements column in the daily newspaper.

Mrs. Bedsole uses specially designed letterheads: blue for letters going to parents of a male child and pink for girls.

A baby's picture is on the envelopes and letterheads. Special sets of the stationery are printed for each participating church, carrying the name of the pastor and of Mrs. Bedsole as heading the Baby Ministry.

Each letter is carefully typed, using the stationery of the participating church nearest the new parent, and is signed by that pastor. Since it's assumed that the letter will be preserved as an entry in the baby book of the new arrival, one requirement is that the typing be perfect, with no strike-overs or erasures.

Mrs. Bedsole's husband, a retired U.S. Marine, backs her in this time consuming ministry. "Without Ted's cooperation I wouldn't be able to carry on," she says. "You can't imagine how many times I serve him Kentucky Fried Chicken or hamburgers and Dairy Queen!"

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Erwin L. McDonald is editor emeritus of the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine.



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