



BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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May 16, 1980

80-81

Home Board Urges Amendments to ERISA

ATLANTA (BP)--Directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board expressed alarm about "excessive government entanglement in the missions of the Southern Baptist Convention."

The action, directed toward members of the U.S. Congress, focused alarm on the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA) and related decisions and interpretations.

Those decisions and interpretations by the Internal Revenue Service and the Treasury Department would exclude missionaries and other denominational workers from retirement plans administered by the SBC Annuity Board. The Home Mission Board alone has 3,000 missionaries under appointment.

The board, noting amendments to ERISA proposed by U.S. Sen. Herman Talmadge, D-Ga., urged concerned persons to contact congressmen to support the "Talmadge church plan ERISA amendments to Senate Bill 1076 in conference committee and in the floor votes." Sens. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, and David Boren, D-Okla., are co-sponsors with Talmadge.

By urging amendments, the Home Mission Board joins more than 27 other religious denominations in the U.S. who are concerned about the issue and have formed the Church Alliance for Clarification of ERISA.

"The essence of the matter is that the IRS has defined certain organizations and entities of the church as not part of the church," said Gary Nash, general counsel for the Annuity Board. "The traditional legal definition of the church means the whole church; the whole SBC and everything it does. But the IRS and the Treasury Department are narrowing the definition so that it means the local church on the corner and only that."

The interpretation, seen as a back door way of entanglement in the mission of the church, "is having and will have a disturbing and adverse impact on the missions of the Southern Baptist Convention," the resolution said.

Margrette Stevenson, director of payroll and employee benefits at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, added: "I'm most concerned with the well being and future security in the days of retirement of missionaries and staff members who have given their lives to the cause of home missions. The current ERISA church plan definition could eliminate retirement benefits to some who have served the Lord as completely as have pastors of local churches.

"The IRS recently has finalized regulations which would classify some church missions as not entitled to the same protections as churches presently enjoy," she said.

The regulations threaten the status of such organizations as mission boards, church pension boards, denominational schools, colleges, seminaries, retirement centers, nursing homes, children's homes, hospitals, state conventions, and many others.

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"The government is involving itself in what we traditionally have considered to be church business," Stevenson said. "By doing so, they're defining the mission of the church, and we believe we have the right to make that determination under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

Nash described the underlying issue as one of "church-state separation," adding, "We regard this as encroachment of the federal government on what we believe to be the prerogatives of the church."

He also noted that if ERISA is not amended, no one except employees of local churches may participate in the church plan of retirement.

"The effect is that new plans would have to be created, not only at considerable expense, but of more complexity and increased involvement with governmental regulatory agencies.

"The dollar cost would not provide any additional benefits to plan participants, but would divert funds from mission enterprises to administration of the plan.

"Another facet," he said, "would be that ERISA may even protect the employees right out of their benefits."

The resolution notes the SBC "has consistently opposed excessive government interference with ministries of the local churches and the agencies which help and support them to promote and carry out their mission and ministry." It cites action taken by the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention in Norfolk, Va., supporting "legislation to clarify the church plan definition of ERISA."

William G. Tanner, the board's executive director-treasurer, said: "If the Talmadge church plan amendments are not enacted into law, a significant number of missionaries and denominational workers could forever lose their rights to participate in church plan retirement, which is their deserved reward for faithful service to the churches, the denomination and the Lord."

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Gallup Rebuts Critical
Analysis of Organized Religion

By Bob Stanley

Baptist Press
5/16/80

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Pollster George Gallup Jr. clashed sharply here with a Cincinnati, Ohio, religion editor over the state of organized religion in America and the hope for its future.

The nationally known public opinion sampler gave strong rebuttal to a critical analysis made by Ben Kaufman, religion editor of The Cincinnati Enquirer.

Kaufman had told a packed seminar at the Religious Communications Congress/1980 that "you are not appealing to a great many Americans, and when you leave the United States your failure becomes even more obvious."

The editor, who said he follows "the religion of the heart," asked: "Do you really think God cares whether people know the perfect formulations of the divinity and full humanity of Jesus the Christ? If you do, this is an incredible arrogance and it is resented by a great many people who won't darken the doors of your churches."

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Gallup, who had made his presentation first, rose abruptly to his feet after a question-and-answer period to call for a "fair, balanced account" of the churches' work today.

Kaufman, he charged, did not "say one positive thing about the efforts of Christians and Jews in this country to bring about change in society, how their lives are revolutionized, how they believe in a supernatural power--a power we happen, if we're Christians, to believe is personified in Jesus Christ."

One of their strongest points of disagreement came on the growing strength of conservative, evangelical religious forces in the United States.

Gallup, looking ahead to the church of the 1980s, said the evangelical tide is rising. Already, he said, evangelicals constitute one-fifth of the American population.

He said statistics show evangelicals contribute more generously to the church than non-evangelicals, understand their own faith better, are far more ready to speak out to others about their faith, and place high priority on winning others to their evangelistic faith.

Noting the current debate over the role of the electronic church, Gallup told the religious communicators they should not think of abandoning media evangelism but should "reshape it to our spiritual needs and the taste of the broad spectrum of the Christian population."

Much debate, Gallup said, centers around whether television evangelists draw people away from active participation in their local churches. A study just completed indicates that for every one who becomes less involved in his church because of watching TV evangelists, another says it has made him become more involved, Gallup reported.

Kaufman expressed concern over Gallup's predictions of conservative evangelicals being the wave of the future.

"If George Gallup is right, I'm depressed," he said. He wondered whether religious tests might become a test for public office again, and whether Catholics might have to go to court to exorcize the Protestant understanding of the Bible from public schools.

"Most of the people of the United States, I would wager, have qualms about much of what your churches and other religions do," he commented.

He also accused organized religion with being judgmental of the electronic media evangelists. "At least the electronic church makes house calls!" he quipped.

Kaufman said he had come as a friend to share what people in his world are saying about the church. "I'm out there listening to people you don't know, who don't go to your churches...."

These unchurched people, he said, are "the living symbol of your failure to evangelize the world. And you need to hear what they're saying about you."

New BWA Staff Will Be Nominated in Toronto

WASHINGTON (BP)--A staff of eight persons will be recommended to support general secretary-nominee Gerhard Claas in administrative roles for the Baptist World Alliance for five-year terms beginning in October 1980. Four will be newcomers to the BWA staff.

Paul O. Madsen, chairman of the BWA personnel committee, said that the committee made its selections on the basis of a BWA General Council mandate "to secure a multi-cultural, multi-lingual staff if at all possible." The nominees come from five countries and work in English and eight other languages.

Claas, current associate secretary of the BWA and secretary-treasurer of the European Baptist Federation, Hamburg, Germany, will be nominated for the top BWA post at the 14th Baptist World Congress in Toronto, Canada, July 8-13. His associates are subject to General Council approval that same week.

Claas would succeed Robert S. Denny, a member of the staff since 1956, who has reached retirement age. C. Ronald Goulding, associate secretary since 1965, and Alan C. Prior, associate secretary for Asia since 1973, will also retire.

Denton Lotz, 41, current representative of American Baptist Churches to Central and Eastern Europe and a member of the faculty of the Baptist Theological Seminary, Ruschlikon, Switzerland, will be nominated as associate secretary with responsibility for the divisions of evangelism and education and relief and development.

Reinhold J. Kerstan, 48, director of communications for the North American Baptist Conference in Chicago since 1968, and editor of The Baptist Herald since 1971, will be nominated as associate secretary for the divisions of communications and study and research.

Betty L. Smith, a member of the BWA staff since 1966 and assistant secretary with responsibility for conferences since 1976, will be nominated to continue in that position.

Erna Redlich, a Canadian and a member of the BWA Washington staff since 1968, will be nominated as assistant secretary with responsibility in the division of relief and development.

Edwin Lopez, general secretary of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches, Iloilo City, the Philippines, will be nominated to serve as associate (regional) secretary for Asia. His nomination follows consultation with and recommendation by the Asian Baptist Fellowship.

Knud Wumpelmann, general secretary of the Baptist Union of Denmark and past president of the European Baptist Federation, will be nominated to serve as associate (regional) secretary for Europe. His nomination follows consultation with and recommendation by the European Baptist Federation Council.

Madsen said that two members of the current BWA staff near retirement will be retained on a shorter term contract basis.

Cyril E. Bryant, director of communications since 1957, and associate secretary since 1971, will work as administrative assistant to the general secretary until September 1982, the month following his 65th birthday. Charles F. Wills, an associate secretary with responsibility in finances since 1978, will continue until December 1980.

The appointments of Bryant and Wills will "provide substantial support to the new staff in the transition period," Madsen said.

Lotz is a graduate of the University of North Carolina, Harvard Divinity School, and Hamburg University. Mrs. Lotz once served as a Southern Baptist missionary journeyman to Nigeria.

Kerstan has lived in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, Canada, and the USA, and has a doctor of philosophy degree from Northwestern University, Chicago. Mrs. Kerstan is the former Inger Nilsson of Sweden.

The nominations of Lopez and Wumpelmann as regional secretaries come at a time when the Alliance plans an increased emphasis on its regional structure. They will serve as the Alliance's representatives in their parts of the world and will be responsible for building a strong regional program in keeping with the BWA's programs and objectives.

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Nigerian Hospital Hurt
By New Government Rule

Baptist Press
5/16/80

OGBOMOSHO, Nigeria (BP)--The Ogbomosho (Nigeria) Baptist Medical Centre is in the midst of a financial crisis that will continue until a new method of financing is determined, a spokesman for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board said.

While negotiations are going on with the government of Western State where the hospital is located. John E. Mills, the board's secretary for West Africa, said he is taking a "wait and see" attitude.

The offer of free medicine was the plank in the political platform of one party running for office last fall, Mills said, and the Ogbomosho hospital happens to be in one of the four or five states where that party came to power. They did not, he added, gain control of the federal government.

The party's new ruling says that the hospital cannot charge for its services or drugs and promises that the government will supply necessary drugs at their pharmacies. Hospital authorities have complained that drugs and supplies are not always available.

Southern Baptists do not give financial subsidy to the Ogbomosho hospital, Mills said. The board continues to support financially the missionaries under appointment there, but that has been the only financial assistance given by Southern Baptists since the government started paying the salaries of national workers at the hospital in 1975.

Mills explained that the board's policy not to give financial support to work that is also supported by any government. When subsidies from the Foreign Mission Board were first cut, he added, the hospital was not hurt because fees being charged made up the difference.

Now, he said, the hospital does not have any source of meeting expenses that fall outside those drug and salary expenses met by the government. As part of the negotiations with the government the hospital may be able to charge a patient requesting a private room, but this would be on such a small scale that it would not help the hospital's financial status, Mills added.

Mills said he does not see the free medicine platform as a plan to nationalize the hospitals, but rather a political move which hadn't considered the cost involved.

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The Baptist Hospital in Shaki, Nigeria, has a similar problem, Mills added, but this medical unit is under the auspices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention and is completely staffed by Nigerians. The Baptist Hospital in Eku, Nigeria, does not have the problems because it is located in another state, he said.

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Armstrong Offering Behind
But Still Tops \$5 Million

Baptist Press
5/16/80

ATLANTA (BP)--The Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for home missions is running slightly behind last year, but still has topped the \$5 million mark, William G. Tanner told directors of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

Tanner, executive director-treasurer, said the offering reached \$5,009,872 on May 13, which was nine tenths of a percent, or about \$45,000, behind last year at the comparable time.

"So far, we have received about 35.2 percent of the goal of \$15.5 million, and it's too early to project total receipts. However, we're expecting to be close to the overall goal," Tanner said, noting the slow start for the offering, caused by a massive snow and ice storm which cancelled church services on the first day.

He said he believes it will reach at least \$15.4 million, and quite possibly top the goal.

"The Home Mission Board will continue to emphasize the placing of resources in personnel involved in witnessing and ministering rather than in capital expenditures," Tanner said.

"We are continuing to put our funds in people rather than in property or institutions. In fact, it has been more than 10 years since we have bought property for a mission center."

He added that while the board does operate some institutions, most are in cooperation with state conventions, associations and churches.

"The day may come when the Home Mission Board will solely operate only one or two institutional centers, and they will have national ministries, such as the Sellers Baptist Home and Adoption Center in New Orleans," he said.

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Institutionalized Rights
Act Passes Congress

Baptist Press
5/16/80

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. House of Representatives passed a final version of the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act, clearing the measure for President Carter's signature.

The conference report on the measure (H.R. 10) cleared the Senate by a vote of 56 to 37 a week earlier after its supporters succeeded on a fourth try to end a filibuster led by Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C. House passage completed months of effort by the bill's backers since its introduction in early 1979 by Rep. Robert Kastenmeier, D -Wis., and Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind.

The act grants to the U.S. attorney general specific statutory authority to bring or intervene in suits against a state after determining that there is a "pattern or practice" of depriving institutionalized persons of rights guaranteed by law or the constitution.

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The measure applies to institutions which "are owned, operated, or managed by, or provide services on behalf of any state or political subdivision of a state." The act includes institutions for the mentally ill, disabled or retarded and jails or prisons, pretrial detention centers, juvenile facilities, nursing homes and other facilities for immediate or long-term care, or custodial or residential care.

Privately owned and operated facilities are not covered by the bill. The committee report explained that "there must be a significant relationship with the state before an institution or facility comes within the purview of this act.

Before filing a suit, the act requires the attorney general to give advance notification, allow reasonable time after notification for states to take corrective action, and inform state officials of available federal assistance which might be used in correcting deficiencies.

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High Court Won't Decide
Kentucky School Case

Baptist Press
5/16/80

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court declined to review a decision by the Supreme Court of Kentucky limiting the right of Kentucky education officials to regulate private church-related schools.

The Kentucky court ruled last October that the state's attempt to impose minimum standards in such areas as teacher certification and textbook approval is a violation of the state constitution which forbids that "any man be compelled to send his child to any school to which he may be conscientiously opposed."

The state had first sought to enforce the regulations by denying accreditation to the schools involved and then by directing local officials to prosecute the parents of children involved.

Such steps were barred when Franklin Circuit Court Judge Henry Meigs ruled that they amounted to a violation of the free exercise and establishment clauses of the First Amendment as well as of section five of the Kentucky constitution.

In its petition for a hearing before the Supreme Court, the Kentucky Board for Elementary and Secondary Education argued that section five "stands for nothing more and nothing less than that parents are not required to send their children to public schools."

The high court's decision not to hear the case does not necessarily mean that states cannot regulate private schools. It means only that the justices chose not to review this particular case.

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Rogers Urges Women
To Reject Humanism

By Mike Davis

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (BP)--Some 4,000 women from Alaska to Florida packed two auditoriums at Bellevue Baptist Church here to hear Adrian Rogers, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, warn them against yielding to a humanistic morality.

Speaking at the opening session of the three-day Mid-Continent Christian Women's Concerns Conference, Rogers, pastor of Bellevue, told the women, "Build your homes and lives on the Word of God" and reject a humanistic approach of "attempting to solve the problems of mankind apart from God."

Rogers, touching on women's liberation, said he believes in the equality of the sexes, adding, "I'm of the opinion that a woman is infinitely superior to a man--at being a woman--and a man is infinitely superior to a woman--at being a man.

"We are equal but thank God we are not the same," he said. "It's not a matter of equality. Before the Lord Jesus we are all equal, but we are not the same, and anybody with an umption of gumption and a fraction of sense knows that."

Basing his comments on the biblical record in Genesis of building the Tower of Babel, Rogers decried humanism as a way of life in America. "It's a highway to Hell," he told the women. "People in America are ego maniacs, strutting their way to Hell, thinking they are too good to be damned."

Rogers said humanists would have persons believe that man can solve his own problems, run his own life, and make his own decisions apart from God. "Modern man has decided to dethrone God and enthrone himself in all his...glory. He worships at the shrine of his computers, and he thinks he is going to be able to solve all the world's problems with materialistic means," Rogers declared.

To confront that attitude, Rogers urged the women to put their faith in the Word of God and reject humanistic values that replace God with man.

Mrs. Adrian (Joyce) Rogers, chairperson of the conference, said a waiting list of 800 beyond the conference's original registration cut-off prompted conference organizers to open a smaller auditorium in addition to the 3,200-seat Bellevue sanctuary to accomodate the overflow. Mrs. Roland (Sarah) Maddox, co-chairperson, said, "We believe we could have had 10,000 women if we had the space."

Built around the theme, "A Wise Woman Builds," the conference features a battery of Christian women speakers and 35 workshops, ranging from such subjects as how to live with teenagers to the biblical and medical perspective on abortion.

Mrs. Maddox, wife of the president of United Resources Corp. and a member of Bellevue, cited the feminist movement, moral pollution and the preservation of the home as conference concerns.

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Mike Davis is director of the editorial services department at the Baptist Brotherhood Commission, Memphis, and a staffer in the Memphis Bureau of Baptist Press