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80-90

CLC Shares Grave Concern
With Network Executives

By Tim Fields

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--During an unprecedented and spirited consultation, staff members of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission told vice-presidents of all three major television networks that Southern Baptists have grave concerns about the low moral quality of many television programs.

The Nashville meeting brought together for the first time executives from ABC, CBS and NBC who approve all non-news networking programming.

According to Harry Hollis, director of family and special moral concerns for the Christian Life Commission, the consultation was held to explore ways that Southern Baptists can have a greater impact on the moral content of television programs and to express dissatisfaction about the immoral themes and trends in television programming.

"We don't have an ax to grind about favors for Southern Baptists," Foy Valentine, executive director of the commission, told the network executives. "Our concerns are moral concerns. There are basic moral values that civilized people can agree on. When writers and producers give you programs that are immoral or amoral we want you to resist them."

Hollis told the network censors that he was appalled by the television treatment of incest, homosexuality and other social ills.

"We are not saying that television should not ever deal with these issues," Hollis said. "We are saying that if you do, it should be done in a morally responsible manner. Don't glamorize this kind of immoral behavior. The portrayal of incest and homosexuality on television rarely shows the kind of pain it brings to people in real life situations."

Hollis also chided censors for allowing immoral behavior to be sensationalized in promotions for upcoming programs or series.

In response to charges leveled by the moral concerns agency and by consultant participant Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, the network executives said they welcomed the criticism and suggestions of Southern Baptists but they decried any attempt at control or censorship.

"We will not respond well to any group or individual who intends to impose controls in an attempt to affect television programming," said Al Schneider, vice-president of ABC.

"Television is a national medium with a diverse audience and we at the networks must use every ounce of courage to guard our objectivity," he said.

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"We have to present programs that reflect all of society," Schneider said. "We will self-destruct if we don't have a balance. We do have to look to opinion leaders to help us know how to deal better with issues," he said.

Hollis countered by saying that television should not only reflect society but should help to shape it for good. "You cannot ignore your responsibility to act in the public interest," he said.

Schneider and the other network executives said they welcome regular and ongoing critique of programs from Southern Baptists, but gave a specific prescription for the form that criticism should take.

"We need constructive help. We are in serious trouble if we are not criticized," Schneider said. "If Southern Baptists come to us with reason instead of with pressure tactics we will look to them as positive resources for existing moral concerns," he said.

Ralph Daniels, vice-president for broadcast standards at NBC, said he would encourage Southern Baptist viewers to be specific about their criticism of television programs. "If you watch a 'Quincy' or a 'Hart to Hart' program and write to us about something in a particular episode that we should not have done, we can deal with that," he said.

"If you give facts such as program name, date and time of airing, and refer to specific scenes or segments, your letter will probably receive a personal reply," Daniels said. "Letters which appear to be mass produced or are vague have little value and do not carry much weight," he said.

Donn O'Brien, vice-president for program practices at CBS, said he encouraged the Christian Life Commission to continue to keep in constant contact with his network. "Give us specific criticism of specific programs," he said.

Although all three network representatives said they encouraged ongoing input from the commission and from individual Southern Baptists, they took exception to the commission's policy of encouraging Southern Baptists to write sponsors of programs with immoral content and to practice selective buying of those sponsors' products.

In a packet entitled "Help for Television Viewers," introduced just prior to the first airing of the ABC series "Soap," the commission encouraged Southern Baptists to share their concerns with sponsors of any unacceptable program.

In response to the network executives' claims that "tampering" with sponsors was a form of censorship, Valentine said that Christians are morally obligated to communicate their convictions not only to the media but also to advertisers.

Italian Baptist Convention
Took No Action Against Carter

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Contrary to an Associated Press report, the General Assembly of Baptist Churches of Italy did not send a letter to President Carter protesting his foreign policy and the assembly took no official action in this regard.

Southern Baptist missionary Ben Lawton attended the conference and said a letter was drawn up by a group of observers at the meeting and was placed on a table for anyone to sign if they wanted to. Lawton said a group of independent individuals who were concerned with sending a Christian message of reconciliation did sign the letter, but it was not an assembly action.

An Associated Press story datelined from Rome said the convention accused President Carter June 3 of pursuing a foreign policy "contrary to the gospel of Christ."

It said the congress released a statement saying that a large majority of its 120 participants had signed the open letter. The letter was critical of Carter's handling of the Iran crisis, his plans to build the nuclear-tipped cruise missile and his call for U.S. allies in Europe to boost military spending.

The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board has a policy which prohibits its missionaries from becoming involved in politics in the countries where they serve.

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Southern Baptists Lead Fight
To Defeat Gay Rights Issue

By Don Hepburn

Baptist Press
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SAN JOSE, Calif. (BP)--Leading a coalition of community groups, Southern Baptists were able to convince June 3 voters in Santa Clara County to reject two measures that would have prohibited discrimination against homosexuals in employment and housing.

Measures A and B were placed on the ballot after Baptists, working under the name "Concerned Citizens Against the Sexual Orientation Ordinances," secured 58,000 signatures in the county to make the matter a referendum issue.

The Baptists took the action after unsuccessful attempts last summer to prevent the San Jose city council and the Santa Clara county supervisors from passing resolutions banning such discrimination.

In the final county tally 244,095 voters, or 70 percent, were against the enactment and 103,479, or 30 percent, were in favor. In the city of San Jose ballot the measure lost 75 percent to 25 percent.

Noting that the concerned citizens fight was not a "God versus gay" movement, Clifford Harris, director of missions for the San Jose Southern Baptist Association, said, "We feel it was a victory over the gay political leadership and the elected officials who do not listen to their constituency."

Spending during the campaign was heavy. Baptists and other anti-measure interests spent about \$150,000, and supporters of the existing ordinances spent between \$100,000 and \$175,000.

The Baptist concerned citizens group mobilized 300,000 people last fall in the initial petition drive. After qualifying in the referendum, the group organized a coalition representing 326 evangelical, Catholic, Jewish, independent, and Mormon congregations to support the effort to defeat the ordinances.

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Moynihan Withdraws Rider
Barring CIA Use of Clergy

By Larry Chesser

WASHINGTON (BP)--Electing not to press on the floor of the U.S. Senate what may have been a "premature decision," Sen. Daniel P. Moynihan, D-N.Y., withdrew an amendment that would have prohibited intelligence agency use of clergy, academics, and media.

The Senate then approved, 89-1, a measure designed to strengthen congressional oversight of intelligence activities. The measure formalizes an obligation of intelligence agencies to report to Senate and House intelligence committees.

Moynihan said he did not consider it "possible" that the amendment to S.2284 would be accepted and that he did not want "to see defeated, a principle which has not been rejected." The amendment would have barred intelligence agencies from employing "any member of the religious, news media, or academic profession," as well as prohibited intelligence agents from posing as a member of "any real or ostensible" United States religious, news media or academic organization.

The provisions of the Moynihan amendment are similar to the positions urged by the South Southern Baptist Convention's Foreign Mission Board and the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and represent just one of several disputed areas in the original intelligence charter legislation introduced by Sen. Walter D. Huddleston, D-Ky. in February.

The effect of the Senate action is that for now the relationships between clergy and the intelligence community will continue to be regulated by internal regulations on both sides.

However, Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, and Huddleston, who led numerous hearings on charter legislation as chairman of the Subcommittee on Charters and Guidelines, have expressed strong commitment to create a new intelligence agency charter in the next congress.

Huddleston said the charter legislation was "essential" and that issues such as intelligence agency use of clergy, journalists and academics should be part of the "ongoing process" of developing such a charter.

R. Keith Parks, president of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, did not see the failure of the Senate to enact a full prohibition this year as a cause for alarm, but did indicate that he would like to see Congress make such restrictions "so that there is no possibility of a missionary being used by an intelligence agency."

"We don't have any immediate problem that causes us to say that something has to be done on this tomorrow," Parks said. "But we would like to see it eventually."

"My concern," Parks said, "is the ultimate outcome more than the fact that nothing has happened during this session of Congress."

The Foreign Mission Board has an internal policy stating that "missionaries are to maintain carefully their role of spiritual ministry, refraining from any relationship with intelligence operations of any nation (including the United States), or with political movements in the nations where they serve."

The Foreign Mission Board has urged a legislated ban on the use of clergy "to remove any suspicions" that its missionaries are involved in intelligence activities.

High Court Rejects Armstrong Appeal

By Stan Haste

WASHINGTON (BP)--Unanimously and without comment, the U.S. Supreme Court announced it will not review a challenge by Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God to an order by California Attorney General George Deukmejian to turn over all church records, including financial statements.

The controversial Armstrong and his sabbatarian church were taken to court last year by six former members who claimed the 87-year-old leader and other church officials were guilty of misusing church funds. The sect virtually requires that members in good standing give at least one-tenth of their income to the church.

Armstrong and his church's attorney, Stanley Rader, were specifically charged with enriching themselves at the church members' expense. The case has drawn national attention, largely due to investigative reports into allegations by CBS television's "60 Minutes" program.

A number of mainline church groups representing more than 80 million members joined the case in March as friends of the court on Armstrong's side. Several legal briefs have also been filed in support of the Worldwide Church's position.

Renowned church-state attorney Leo Pfeffer of Long Island University, aided by three other church-state lawyers, argued that by placing the Worldwide Church in receivership last year, the California attorney general violated the First Amendment's no establishment and free exercise of religion provisions.

John W. Baker, general counsel of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and one of those who assisted Pfeffer, expressed "disappointment" at the high court's refusal to hear the case "at this time." But, he added, the action "did not come as a surprise and is by no means a final determination."

Baker said he would have preferred that the court argue the case now "on the basic issue of whether church property is indeed public property and subject to the custodial supervision of the state." He attributed the decision not to hear the case to the court's feeling the issues "were not sufficiently sharpened" and "not ripe" at this time.

Besides the Baptist Joint Committee, other groups asking the high court to hear the case included the National Council of Churches, National Association of Evangelicals, Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, Synagogue Council of America, Lutheran Church in America, United Presbyterian Church, Church of the Nazarene, and Unification Church.

According to Baker, the case has now been cleared for argument on its merits in California courts. Once a final resolution in state courts is reached, the case can be appealed again to the Supreme Court. Church-state observers are agreed that regardless of the outcome in California, the case will be appealed to the nation's high court by the losing side.