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80-202

Smith Expresses Regret,
Condemns Anti-Semitism

By Jim Newton

NEW YORK (BP)--Expressing deep regret for any hurt to the Jewish community because of his statements concerning Jews, Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith joined national Jewish leaders in a joint statement abhorring, condemning and rejecting anti-Semitism.

Smith, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Del City, Okla., read a joint statement following a three-and-a-half-hour meeting Dec. 18 with six other Southern Baptists and seven officials of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a national organization of Jewish laymen.

Smith asked for a meeting with ADL national director Nathan Perlmutter in the wake of controversy over Smith's widely reported comments that God does not hear the prayers of Jews and that Jews have funny looking noses.

The statement, issued after a closed door meeting held under tight security at the B'nai B'rith headquarters across the street from the United Nations Building, said:

"The parties agreed that they abhor, condemn and reject anti-Semitism because it violates their respective deeply held religious beliefs;

"Second, both reaffirmed their commitment to their basic theological beliefs without rancor or rejection of each other; and

"Third, both groups have been the victims of religious persecution and even to this day suffer persecution in the Soviet Union and other parts of the world."

The statement concluded: "For the above reasons, they (participants) agreed to establish a joint working relationship in which Baptists and Jews will explore and plan improved methods of communication."

It specifically cited plans for conferences, seminars, academic interchanges, preparation of joint materials and "other means for each community to learn more about the other."

The president of the 13.6 million-member denomination also refused to back down from his previous position. The statement made plain Smith "has distinctive theological beliefs he cannot compromise," but added the Southern Baptist "stands with the Jewish community for total religious liberty" and "for an American pluralistic society."

In the written statement, Smith expressed "deep regret for any hurt to the Jewish community," and said if he had it to do over again, "knowing how it would be misinterpreted," he would not have made the statements.

After reading the statement, which described the meeting as "open and friendly," Smith told reporters he had never met with nicer people in his life. He, however, refused to answer questions from the 15 to 20 representatives of the national and New York news media.

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After Smith declined to answer questions, reporters asked Perlmutter if he considered Smith's earlier remarks anti-Semitic.

"I am satisfied that pastor Smith had no anti-Semitic intent," Perlmutter said. "But I am not satisfied with his beliefs and he is not satisfied with mine either. That's what makes him a Baptist and me a Jew."

In a telephone interview with Baptist Press, Smith said the meeting was "just perfect... they are my friends and they know I love them."

He added he has been invited to the home of one of the participants, Mark Briskman, regional representative of ADL in Dallas, to observe Passover and "both my wife and I plan to go." He said he also discussed the possibility of making a joint trip to Israel with ADL representatives, but made no decision.

Smith, who was elected president of the SBC in June, made national news in mid-September when reporters were given transcripts of a sermon he preached Aug. 22 at the National Affairs Briefing, a conservative religious-political gathering in Dallas.

In that sermon, Smith said "God Almighty does not hear the prayer of a Jew," and commented: "How can God hear the prayer of a man who says that Jesus Christ is not the true messiah? It is blasphemous."

He made national headlines again in mid-November when a tape recording of a sermon he preached Aug. 31 surfaced. In that sermon, on "God's Special People and Special Places," Smith quipped from his pulpit: "Why did he (God) choose the Jews? I don't know why he chose the Jews. I think they've got funny looking noses myself."

Smith said he was making an inside joke with a Jewish friend in the remark, but in the furor which erupted, Smith wrote a letter to Perlmutter, suggesting a dialogue session.

Smith said at the time his intent was to "convince Jewish people that I love them."

Although specific plans for joint Baptist-Jewish activities were not announced at the meeting, one of the participants, Glenn Igleheart, director of the Interfaith Witness Department at the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, said a meeting is planned for January or February to discuss future programs.

Igleheart pointed out his department co-sponsored with the ADL three regional Baptist-Jewish dialogue sessions in 1974, 1978 and 1979 at Wild Acres, N.C., and held two national Baptist-Jewish dialogues with the American Jewish Committee in Louisville, Ky., and Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1970 and 1971.

Other Baptist participants, like Smith, declined to comment on the discussion, saying the joint statement "speaks for itself."

Baptist participants, in addition to Smith and Igleheart, included Russ Bush, professor of the philosophy of religion at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas; John Silvey, pastor of Mountain View Baptist Church near Logan, Okla., and a converted Jew and pro-Israel activist; Jim Lee, an Oklahoma City attorney and a deacon at the Del City church, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Lee.

Jewish participants, in addition to Perlmutter, were Theodore Freedman, national program director; Abraham H. Foxman, associate national director; Maxwell E. Greenberg, national chairman of ADL; Rabbi Ronald B. Sobel, chairman of the national program committee, all of New York City, and Mark Briskman, director of the Northwest Texas-Oklahoma office of ADL.

Israel Reports Show
Best Results of Decade

By Susan Cahen

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Years of patient witness are beginning to show encouraging results for Southern Baptist work in Israel.

Professions of faith and baptisms both have increased dramatically during 1980, reflecting a new interest in Christianity brought about by more than 50 years of missionary efforts, says a Foreign Mission Board official.

"I don't think I have seen anything like this during the time I have been area director," says J.D. Hughey, the board's area director for Europe and the Middle East. "There is no mass movement anywhere, but just a growing interest in religion in general and Christianity in particular and more specifically in Baptists."

Baptist work in what is now Israel was started by a Syrian in 1911, but Southern Baptists accepted responsibility for Palestine in 1921. Missionaries have been at work there since 1923—long before the Republic of Israel was created in 1948.

Today, throughout Israel, Hughey can point to examples of an increasingly successful Baptist witness, and the number of baptisms is the largest in the past decade.

In the past year there have been eight baptisms in the village of Tur'an. Israeli businessman Suhail Ramadan and his family moved to Tur'an from Nazareth so they could "proclaim the gospel." The village had been a mission point for Nazareth Baptist Church. Now Ramadan must commute to Nazareth for work. His wife has begun a kindergarten in Tur'an as a means of witnessing in the village.

Southern Baptist missionaries Ray and Beverly Hicks also have moved to Tur'an to help strengthen this newly responsive area.

Nazareth Baptist Church, in an area that has for some time had encouraging response to the Baptist witness, reported 31 baptisms between June 1 and Oct. 31, the end of the reporting year. On the last Sunday in October, the church had 240 people attending Sunday School, the largest group ever.

Much of the Baptist influence in Nazareth and the whole Galilee area has been due to the Nazareth Baptist School, Hughey says. There are 600 pupils of varied backgrounds and "Baptists have become known and respected. Doors have opened for a Christian witness through this school.

"It is unashamedly Christian," Hughey adds. Regular chapel services and even revival services are held in the school for faculty and students.

Other significant events of the past year in the development of Baptist work in Israel have been: The remodeling of West Jerusalem Baptist Church to provide more space for a growing congregation; reopening of the Christian Service Training Center after a three-year interval; 55 professions of faith and four commitments to full-time Christian service at a summer camp session at Baptist Village, Petah Tiqva, and a leadership seminar which trained 22 young people (there are only seven national Baptist pastors in Israel).

Hughey also cited the home ministries work of three missionary couples, who are establishing house churches with groups of up to 25 to 30 people meeting for worship and Bible study.

Another area of optimism for future work, Hughey says, is the significant number of Jews who are messianic, but don't call themselves Christian because of the historical connotation of the term Christian. There is no defined group of these people but there is an indigenous movement where they are beginning to find each other, and contact with Christian groups, including Baptists, are increasing, he said.

It is difficult for these people to convert, Hughey explained, as acts of violence very often are perpetrated against them. Because those who abandon Judaism very often have serious problems to contend with, he added, frequently the messianic Jew and the Jewish Christian still claim to be Jewish—they simply find in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of Judaism.

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Missionary Doctor in Ghana
Injured in Traffic Mishap

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TAMALE, Ghana (BP)--Walter Moore, Southern Baptist medical missionary from Beggs, Okla., was seriously injured Dec. 18 in a traffic accident near Tamale, Ghana.

Moore was taken to the Tamale Government Hospital with head injuries, chest injuries including a broken rib, and a broken kneecap. Surgery is scheduled Dec. 22 to repair the kneecap, according to the report that came from missionary Larry Rymal over ham radio.

The missionary doctor was in a truck transporting medical supplies which hit the rear of a dump truck 20 miles south of Tamale.

Moore is conscious and a missionary nurse stationed here, Joyce Davis, is with him. Two other doctors serving in Ghana, missionary Fran Greenway of Ladonia, Texas, and special project worker Andy Norman of Lincolnton, Ga., were expected to assist in the doctor's treatment.

Because of the shortage of medical personnel in Ghana, Moore has been carrying a three-fold assignment with medical duties in public health, medical practice at the Baptist hospital and outpatient clinic, and business management responsibilities at the hospital.

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Pile of Rubble, Pair of Pants
Show Quake Victims' Plight

By Helen Ruchti

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ROME (BP)--As the man and his wife looked through the pile of rubble which was once their home, the man leaned over and picked up a pair of pants. He shook them to dislodge the dirt and folded them.

"My wife and I have lost everything. We're trying to salvage what we can," he explained.

This couple were only two of seven million touched by the November earthquake in southern Italy. And they were only two of those seen by Southern Baptist missionaries Bob Holifield and Stanley Crabb on a survey trip through the area.

This trip prompted the Italian Baptist Mission (organization of Southern Baptist missionaries) to ask for and receive \$276,000 of hunger relief money from the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

In Bisaccia, Holifield and Crabb found pastor Donato Castelluccio well and in good spirits. His church's recent renovation had been only slightly marred. Though winter's usual bitter cold had Bisaccia in its grip, the church had just acquired heat.

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When he felt the tremors, Castelluccio just went to bed. There wasn't anything he could do about it. But he was one of the lucky ones. In heavily hit areas, those who ran into the streets were the ones who survived.

In southern Italy, farm after farm was destroyed. "Usually when an American farmhouse burns or is destroyed, at least the chimney remains standing. But there is nothing left of many farms—nothing but a pile of rocks," explained Crabb.

Word had reached Rome, where Holifield and Crabb are stationed, that several Baptists living in Calitri had left their homes just in time to avoid being buried alive. One Baptist walked out, closed the door, and the house fell in.

Fearing the worst, the Americans parked outside town and walked in. Calitri had no Baptist church, but nurtured several persons who have become outstanding workers in Italian Baptist institutions. Now a landslide threatens to finish off what the earthquake left of the town.

In Lioni, Holifield and Crabb saw garages in which cars had been compacted to a height of no more than two feet. They talked with a couple who had been buried in their home for one and a half hours before someone dug them out. But the couple knew they were the fortunate ones. Their home was beyond repair, but the bruises and cuts on the woman's face would heal.

Another woman searched for salvageable items where a crane was clearing away debris. She grabbed some sheets, explaining that the house belonged to her brother-in-law and it was necessary to save from the wrecker whatever was still usable.

Her race against the machine continued as the men walked away to see more buildings—some crushed, some cracked and uninhabitable; some old, one new. Only in recent years have Italians built with structural steel. The centuries-old stone structures had no structural support to withstand the quakes. The penthouse of an eight-floor building was sliding, hanging precariously from the top floor of another structure.

Teora looked as if it had been bulldozed. It may join the Mediterranean area's list of cities which are no more and wait for some future archaeologist to uncover its secrets.

Finally, Holifield and Crabb arrived in Senerchia, where evangelicals have erected a tent under the town's only remaining light. The tent, which was used successfully for evangelistic crusades in Turin, has become a community center where people come to warm their hands in front of gas heaters, have a cup of tea or coffee, and find relief from the chilling rain and snow.

Italian Baptists, who will feed 600 a day for the next six months with the Foreign Mission Board appropriation, chose to aid Senerchia in spite of discouraging advice from civil authorities. They realized it was a community which needed help. Living in a hilltop town at the end of a road, Senerchia residents had long been accustomed to being ignored. Their first rescuers did not appear until two days after the quake.

Led by men such as Italian Baptist pastors Pino Mollica and Bruno Colombu, volunteers have been spending several days each in Senerchia to cook, counsel with people and distribute goods sent by other Italians and people around the world.

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(BP) photos mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press.

CORRECTION: In (BP) story mailed 12/18/80 entitled "Baptists Boost Aid To Italy; Will Feed 600 Through Winter," please change \$237,000 mentioned in graphs 1 and 4 to \$276,000.

Thanks--Baptist Press