



BAPTIST PRESS

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'Inerrant Bible' Idolatrous Claims Biblical Translator

By Dan Martin

DALLAS (BP)--"The Scriptures are fine in their place, but that place isn't on the throne; that place goes to Jesus," a noted Bible translator said.

Robert Bratcher, one of the main translators of "Good News For Modern Man," spoke on the authority of the Bible during a three-day national seminar of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission on the use and abuse of power.

The former Southern Baptist foreign missionary and pastor criticized belief in biblical inerrancy: "Only willful ignorance or intellectual dishonesty can account for the claim that the Bible is inerrant and infallible. To qualify this absurd claim by adding 'with respect to the autographs (original manuscripts)' is a bit of sophistry, a specious attempt to justify a patent error.

"No truth-loving, God-respecting, Christ-honoring believer should be guilty of such heresy. To invest the Bible with the qualities of inerrancy and infallibility is to idolatryze it, to transform it into a false god."

Bratcher, a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the major reason for the "wrong attitude" of inerrancy is that proponents "confuse the book with the revelation."

"Often in the past and still too often in the present to affirm that the Bible is the Word of God implies that the words of the Bible are the words of God. Such simplistic and absolute terms divest the Bible altogether of its humanity and remove it from the relativism of the historical process.

"No one seriously claims that all the words of the Bible are the very words of God. If someone does so it is only because that person is not willing thoroughly to explore its implications," Bratcher added.

The translator said that "the Word of God is not words; it is a human being, a human life..." and went on to explain that "words attempt to describe what is finally beyond their power to describe, an intense personal experience. But words remain signs and pointers and the reality they point at is not ever to be identified with the words themselves."

Bratcher warned modern-day Christians not to "come to the Bible in order to find in it the ready-made answers to our questions and prompt solutions to our problems," and said: "We are supposed to hear not just what the Spirit said to seven churches in Asia Minor in the First Century A.D., but what the Spirit says today to the churches in Philadelphia, Tenn.; Smyrna, N.C.; Ephesus, Ga.; Sardis, Ky.; and Thyatira, Miss."

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"Quoting what the Bible says in the context of its history and culture is not necessarily relevant or helpful—and may be a hindrance in trying to meet and solve the problems we face."

The scholar added that "we are not bound by the letter of scripture, but by the spirit. Even words spoken by Jesus in Aramaic in the thirties of the first century and preserved in writing in Greek, 35 to 50 years later, do not necessarily wield compelling or authentic authority over us today. The locus of scriptural authority is not the words themselves. It is Jesus Christ as THE Word of God who is the authority for us to be and to do."

Jesus, THE Word of God, Bratcher said, "offers us freedom: unwanted, threatening, burdensome, frightening freedom...with all its risks, uncertainties, doubts and dilemmas. But freedom is never easy to possess, never safe. We are given no easy solutions; we are not assured of success. We must be content, if not willing, to live with doubts and ambiguities, with unresolved dilemmas and irritating tensions."

Then, he added: "As a biblical scholar, I view with dismay the misuse of scriptures by fundamentalists; as ... Christians we listen with alarm to the simple-minded diagnoses and the simplistic panaceas proposed with smug self-assurance by Moral Majority people intent on curing the evils of this age."

"We must always be aware of how complex are the problems we address and remind ourselves of our inability to foretell, much less to dictate, the consequences of our actions. Sincerity and earnestness of purpose do not guarantee purity of heart, nor do political savvy or expertise in sociology," he said.

He concluded by saying: "We are given authority by the Lord the Spirit to speak and to act, but we can never know in advance that we are doing the will of God. It is the height of presumption and arrogance to say, 'I know this is God's will, and I am doing it.'

"No greater responsibility; no higher privilege is given to us than to hear and obey."

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Smith Visits Work in Kenya,
Returns as Missions Booster

By Mary Jane Welch

Baptist Press
3/25/81

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Southern Baptist Convention President Bailey Smith returned from a visit with Southern Baptist missionaries in Kenya saying he plans to make Southern Baptists aware of the great investment they have in missions.

"These people (missionaries) are there every day making strides in witness and ministry," he said after a week in Kenya.

He also said he would continue encouraging his church, First Southern Baptist Church, Del City, Okla., to make substantial increases in Cooperative Program giving, because he has seen that the money is well spent. Del City increased its Cooperative Program giving by 200 percent from \$50,000 last year, to \$150,000 this year, he said. The Cooperative Program is the voluntary channel for funds from churches to support the missions and educational enterprises of the convention.

Smith attended an all-night prayer meeting at Ngerenia Baptist Church, where 25 people made professions of faith after he preached outside the church under a single lantern.

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The SBC president visited missionaries and mission work in the Nairobi, Limuru, Mombasa and Malindi areas and preached an ordination sermon for 23 Kenyan Baptist pastors at Malindi Baptist Church. Thirteen of the pastors became Christians during the 1976-77 Giryama evangelistic project in Kenya and have been leading churches started during that time. The service was the first ordination service in the association.

Smith later attended the **dedication** of a well dug using Baptist relief funds in an area where women had been spending much of each day walking to find fresh water. People walked up to 25 miles to attend the service and more than 100 responded to Smith's invitation to become Christians.

Three wells had been dug earlier in the area with relief money from the Foreign Mission Board, but all contained salty water. After the fourth well was dug, 763 people were counted getting water from it in one day.

Smith said he had heard before his trip that Southern Baptist missionaries lived in luxury, but "I didn't see any luxury. Everyone I met—their whole life was their work."

Smith was accompanied by Robert Harris, a layman in his church; Tom Elliff, his brother-in-law and pastor of Eastwood Baptist Church, Tulsa, Okla.; and John Majors, a layman in Elliff's church who spent most of the time in Uganda repairing bulldozers. The Ugandan government had said missionaries could have the abandoned bulldozers if they would repair them.

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Baptist Missionaries Stay;
Independents Leave Grenada

By Susan Cahen

Baptist Press
3/25/81

GRENADA, Windward Islands (BP)--Five Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to the Caribbean island of Grenada are staying despite the withdrawal of 10 independent missionaries of the Berean Mission Inc.

"An accelerated Cuban presence and intensified anti-American voice" was the group's reason for withdrawing, according to Elaine Herrin, Southern Baptist press representative there.

Grenada, a former British colony, became independent in 1973, but fell to the present Cuban-style socialist regime in a March 1979 revolution.

Don Kammerdiener, Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board director for Middle America and the Caribbean, said he does "not feel the facts warrant withdrawal of our missionaries."

Board officials will continue to watch the situation in Grenada, Kammerdiener said, "but the fact that there is a Marxist government in power does not mean that our missionaries must withdraw. Southern Baptists strive to work effectively in several countries ruled by Marxist governments, as well as in countries governed by other systems."

General political fears do prevail in Grenada, he said, and "there has been a decline in tourism and, consequently, a decline in the economy. Some Americans are feeling the strain and are not feeling as welcome as before." But he said he was "not aware of any overt movement" to force Americans to leave.

Many people are nervous, he said, about the large contingent of Cuban advisors and the construction of an airfield many islanders feel is too large for civilian needs.

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Southern Baptist work on the island is doing very well, Kammerdiener affirmed, although missionary dentist Carter Davis recently was told Cuban dentists would meet the needs in an area where he has been working.

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Law Upheld Requiring
Abortion Notification

Baptist Press
3/25/81

WASHINGTON (BP)--In a 6-3 decision the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a Utah statute requiring physicians to "notify, if possible," the parents or guardian of a minor before performing an abortion.

The high court's decision affirmed earlier rulings by a Utah trial court and the Utah Supreme Court that state law does not violate a minor's constitutional right to privacy in obtaining an abortion.

The Utah case involved an unmarried 15-year-old who was living with her parents and dependent upon them for support when she learned she was pregnant. She challenged the state statute when her physician refused to perform an abortion without first notifying her parents.

In delivering the court's opinion, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger noted that the Utah law, which requires parental notification but not parental consent for abortions, "serves the important considerations of family integrity and protecting adolescents" when applied to "immature and dependent" minors.

The Utah statute, Burger wrote, "gives neither parents nor judges veto power over the minor's decision to abort."

The Supreme Court held that the appellant lacked standing to challenge the constitutionality of the Utah statute's potential application to all unmarried minor girls, including those who are mature and emancipated.

Thus the court ruled on the constitutionality of the parental notice requirement only in the cases involving immature and dependent minors.

Burger concluded that when the Utah law is applied to immature and dependent minors, it "serves state interests; it is narrowly drawn to protect only those interests and does not violate any guarantees of the Constitution."

Justice Thurgood Marshall, joined by Justices William J. Brennan Jr. and Harry A. Blackmun, dissented, saying the Utah law "infringes upon the constitutional right to privacy attached to a minor woman's decision to complete or terminate her pregnancy."

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High Court To Hear
Church-State Case

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3/25/81

WASHINGTON (BP)--The U.S. Supreme Court will review one church-state case but has declined consideration of two others.

The high court agreed to consider the federal government's appeal of a western Pennsylvania district court decision which relieved a member of the Old Order Amish religion from paying the employer's share of Social Security taxes and from withholding Social Security taxes from the wages of Amish employees because such taxes infringe upon their free exercise of religion.

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Old Order Amish consider it a violation of their faith to receive Social Security benefits or pay Social Security taxes.

Present federal law exempts Old Order Amish who are self-employed from Social Security taxes. In its request that the Supreme Court review the district court decision, the federal government asserted that Congress did not intend that the exemption be extended beyond self-employed Amish to those who are employers and employees.

In another case, the high court let stand a ruling by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals that a Catholic high school in New York which was no longer owned by the Catholic diocese but still required propagation of Catholic values is exempt from National Labor Relations Board jurisdiction.

The NLRB had ruled in 1978 that Bishop Ford Central Catholic High School violated the National Labor Relations Act by refusing to recognize and bargain with the lay faculty association.

In its request for appeal, the lay faculty association said the Second Circuit Court's decision means that "potentially thousands of workers employed in institutions which claim to engage in a 'religious mission' will lose their statutory rights to bargain collectively and their constitutional rights of association."

Ford Central contended that the decision "correctly focused on the religious nature and activity of the school," and that the diocese maintained "a significant degree of control over the school" since the real property would revert back to the diocese from the private governing board should the school cease to be Catholic.

In a third case, the Supreme Court denied a petition for rehearing by a New Jersey Episcopal church in a property dispute with the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of Newark.

The high court has consistently held that hierarchical church bodies control the properties of local congregations.

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First Amendment Abuse
Could Destroy Again

Baptist Press
3/25/81

DALLAS (BP)--Abuses of the First Amendment destroyed John Henry Faulk's career and it could happen again, Faulk warned at a national seminar on the use and abuse of power.

Faulk, a Christian and personality on the "Hee Haw" television series, told about 400 participants at the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission annual seminar he was black-listed and later fired from CBS during the McCarthy era communist hunt.

He said the lives of many of his friends were ruined because groups of self-appointed communist hunters had a "Jerry Falwellish attitude of asserting power with arrogance" to smash people's lives.

Saying the Constitution and First Amendment admonish against government meddling in the field of conscience and religion, Faulk said the founding fathers understood that we were "a nation of Christian people and not a Christian nation because civil government has no role to play in the conscience of men."

The intrusion of the government into personal birth control methods was discussed by James M. Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington, D.C.

If the human life amendment to the Constitution is passed and enforced, Americans will have government in the doctor's offices and bedrooms, Dunn warned.

Dunn was critical of the new political-religious right, saying, "without any sign of understanding Christian ethics, they would impose by force of law their own brand of morality."

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