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Bailey Smith's Pulpit  
Daunts Jewish Speaker

By Theodore Freedman

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Theodore Freedman, director of the National Program Division of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish laymen's organization, spoke at First Southern Baptist Church in Del City, Okla., and wrote a first person account of his experience.)

DEL CITY, Okla. (BP) — If a Jew had ever appeared before this audience, nobody could remember.

Although I have appeared before many Christian church groups and all types of audiences, nothing really prepared me for this address before 3,000 people at First Southern Baptist Church.

Even the very pulpit was daunting--in the form of a cross. Also, I was speaking from a platform where spellbinders hold forth; none more impressive than Bailey Smith, president of the 13.6 million Southern Baptist Convention, and my host.

There was an air of unreality that made me ask myself: What was a Jew doing on this platform--in the heart of the Bible Belt before a fundamentalist Christian audience?

It went back to last September when Smith made his widely quoted remark that "God Almighty does not hear the prayers of a Jew." That led to his request for a meeting with the Anti-Defamation League in New York. There he expressed deep regret for any hurt he might have caused the Jewish community and said if he had to do it over again--knowing how his remarks would be misinterpreted--he would not have made them.

Not only did Smith help repair the damage his unfortunate words had caused, but he has since said he stands for a united Jerusalem and an end to anti-semitism.

Of course, all this does not gainsay the fact that there are and will continue to be theological differences between us. But we have reaffirmed respect--and new regard--for each other's viewpoints.

My appearance at First Southern was one tangible expression of this. As Smith welcomed the congregation and the choir performed, I wondered how I would be received. Glancing at the platform, I could see a little apprehension on Smith's face. No doubt, he was wondering what I would say.

Earlier that afternoon, sensing his nervousness, I asked if he wanted to reconsider his invitation. No, he said. Then he hesitated, asking if he could think about it. Within minutes, he called me back: "I invited you to speak and you're going to speak," he said.

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Now, sitting in the first row at the regular Wednesday night service in the huge red brick church, I glanced at my prepared text and then gazed at the scene around me. The atmosphere of the congregation made me think of small synagogues, like those in Eastern Europe, filled with Lubavichers or other Hassidic Jews.

The worshippers were immersed in communicating with God and felt no self-consciousness in sharing their feelings with people around them. The spirit was marvelously informal and friendly. Infants sat on their mothers' laps; their cries going unnoticed, or at least accepted as part of the normalcy of the shared experience.

The people were alive and natural—a far cry from the hushed, puritanical religious services one experiences in so many other houses of worship.

Now Smith introduced me to the audience. When he called my name, there was warm applause.

As I spoke, my nervousness evaporated. When I referred to our common scriptures, I could hear murmurs of "amen, amen."

I told the assemblage that we have been separated for too long and at times this has caused misunderstanding and tension. "But in the midst of that we have found reconciliation. Just as Jacob and Esau grew apart and became alienated one from the other, so too unfortunately, have we Jews and Southern Baptists. And yet, like Jacob and Esau, we now meet with outstretched arms and greet each other with the word 'shalom' —peace."

I spoke of the celebrations of Passover and Easter: "Passover for us is the seminal holiday in the Jewish calendar. . . .When we recall not only our own suffering in bondage but renew our commitment to the struggle for freedom and human dignity for Jews and Gentiles throughout the world who live under the yoke of tyranny. . . ."

"We have suffered the cataclysmic Holocaust, but we also rejoice in the rebirth of the people and land of Israel. As Ezekiel, the prophet, did, we too, looked into the valley of death and saw bones, dry bones in the ashes of Auschwitz—and we too asked: 'Will these bones live again?'

"We heard God's resounding voice speaking to us through the state of Israel, saying, 'Yes, the Jewish people live and will live— Am Yisroel Chai Viyichyeh.'

"On Good Friday, you commemorate the death of Jesus and recall the travails he underwent in his passion. But three days later, you celebrate Easter and proclaim 'Christ is risen.' You too affirm that darkness will be followed by light, night by day, suffering by joy, and death by resurrection."

When I finished there was applause and members of the congregation came up to shake my hand. Then Smith delivered his sermon, preaching on the importance of people being adaptable to change.

He never mentioned all that has happened since last September; he didn't have to. As we left the auditorium, and more people came up to shake my hand and wish me well, I felt a great sense of satisfaction.

I felt that I had seen a new Bailey Smith, a different Bailey Smith from last year or even from the Bailey Smith prior to last December when he visited ADL.

Afterward, Smith, his family and I went to a local ice cream parlor where, without ceremony, he waited on line along with other patrons to order.

It was in keeping with the atmosphere between friends.

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Fire Claims Home  
While Family In L.A.

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WILLCOX, Ariz. (BP) — Fire erased Hershel Henkel's past while he and his family attended the Southern Baptist Convention in Los Angeles.

Flames June 9 completely consumed Henkels' mobile home and every article of furniture, appliance and memorabilia they had. Gone are their paintings, dishes, clothes, teen-age son Mark's guitar, Henkel's grandfather clock, organ, piano and years of sermon notes, along with his personal library.

Henkel, associational missionary for Cochise and Mount Graham Baptist Associations, had his office in the mobile home and all the records for the two associations also burned to ash.

Neighbors saved an old truck and a car, which they towed away from the blaze. Damage was estimated at \$40,000 of which insurance will cover half.

Henkel, who will live in a home belonging to the association, said, "If you don't have it, you don't have to have it."

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High Court Loses Stewart  
In Surprise Retirement

By Stan Haste

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WASHINGTON (BP) — Potter Stewart, associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court for the past 23 years, announced his resignation in a move that caught most high court observers by surprise.

Although he is second only to senior Associate Justice William J. Brennan Jr. in length of service on the court, Stewart, at 66, is one of its "younger" members.

Five justices, Chief Justice Warren E. Burger, Brennan, Thurgood Marshall, Harry A. Blackmun and Lewis F. Powell Jr., are all over 70, with Brennan the oldest at 75.

Stewart, along with Byron R. White and John Paul Stevens, is one of three justices in their 60s. Justice William H. Rehnquist is 56.

According to the Constitution, Supreme Court justices are appointed for life, with no retirement date even suggested.

In a letter of resignation delivered May 18 but released exactly one month later, Stewart told President Ronald Reagan simply "that it is time to go." Although he offered the president no further word of explanation, Stewart told reporters he decided to leave the bench while he was still healthy and able to enjoy life.

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On the cluster of issues before the court in the church-state field, an area of particular interest to Baptists, Stewart was not known as a leader. Rarely did he write a formal opinion for the high court in the field.

While he generally opposed funding of private, sectarian schools with public monies, he joined a majority in making certain exceptions, including approval of transportation, health care and a number of "auxiliary services" for parochial school pupils.

But Stewart was best-known in the church-state arena for his lone dissents in the two most highly publicized cases during his tenure, the landmark prayer and Bible reading decisions of 1962 and 1963. Stewart alone took exception to the rulings which declared that states may not require prayer and Bible reading as devotional exercises in public schools.

During a news conference the day after his retirement announcement, Stewart said the dissent in the 1962 New York school prayer case provoked more public reaction than any other of his estimated 300 opinions for the court and another 300 separate opinions. He told reporters he received 3,000 letters after the 1962 dissent. Some of the mail caused him embarrassment, Stewart said, in that the position taken was based on "my understanding of the Constitution," not on religious views.

He said further that "the mark of a good justice" is not his political or religious identity but his objectivity, conscientiousness and diligence, along with the commitment that "every human being is equal before the law."

On a matter of special concern to proponents of church-state separation, Stewart said he is concerned about efforts in Congress to strip the Supreme Court and other federal courts of jurisdiction in areas where critics of the courts feel judges have abandoned the Constitution.

Saying he is "glad I won't be here to have to struggle" with the constitutional questions such an effort, if successful, would present, the retiring justice urged Congress to follow past tradition and refuse to pass such legislation.

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Middle America Offers  
Urgent Opportunities

By Bob Stanley

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6/19/81

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—A new urgency underscores Southern Baptist missionary work in the troubled heart of middle America.

Like many developing areas, this strategic sector linking two continents is changing. Strong outside influences, combined with varying degrees of local unrest, already have toppled one government and threaten another.

In Guatemala, the tempo of guerrilla attacks has increased in recent months. Southern Baptist missionaries stay out of politics, but this doesn't mean they aren't affected by it.

Harry Byrd, coordinator of the 25 missionaries assigned to Guatemala, was eating supper at his home in Guatemala City April 30 when his neighbor interrupted to ask to use the Byrds' phone to call police.

The neighbor operates an international radio station on his property, and that night 10 masked guerrillas seized the station, put their propaganda on the air, and forced the staff to evacuate after warning them all entrances had been wired to explosives that would be set off by anyone trying to re-enter.

Byrd, a veteran of 14 years in Guatemala, seemed relatively unperturbed by the incident. A special police squad later determined the "bombs" were just empty boxes, he reported.

Reflecting the next morning on the incident, Byrd commented, "I've been praying the Lord would help me to get better acquainted with my neighbors."

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In some countries like El Salvador, missionaries have to measure the risk they take in staying against the need for them to remain. A Baptist leader in another middle American country puts it this way: the insecurity of people whose nations are torn by fighting makes the security offered by faith in Christ all the more desirable.

Few missionaries would want to be martyrs, or by staying, to endanger their national Baptist church members who might try to protect them.

But by taking certain precautions, working in areas that are believed to be relatively safe, and concentrating on training local church leaders, most Southern Baptist missionaries plan to stay as long as they feel it's safe to do so.

Much work remains to be done in areas that are safe and where there's almost unprecedented openness to the gospel.

Honduras, as yet little affected by the troubles of its western neighbor El Salvador, has welcomed hundreds of U.S. volunteers who have built churches, held dental and medical clinics, and fitted thousands of persons with eyeglasses.

Now the 33 Southern Baptist missionaries assigned to this country, about the size of Tennessee, are issuing an urgent call for more general evangelist missionaries to help them take advantage of the goodwill and openness created by the volunteer teams.

"We can use all the general evangelist missionaries we can get," says Tom Canady, chairman of the Honduras Baptist mission (the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries in this country).

In Guatemala, convention president Isidro Hernandez puts priority on the need for "pioneer type" missionaries who can work alongside Guatemalan Baptists to open new areas.

Such a team approach provides an effective way of training the Guatemalan Baptist. If for any reason the missionary has to leave, a trained worker remains who can carry on the evangelistic outreach, Hernandez says.

What can Southern Baptists do to support missionaries in such troubled areas of the world? One Middle American mission observer put it this way:

1. Pray for their physical safety.
2. Pray for their emotional stability. "It's awfully easy to begin thinking with anything but your head in circumstances like that. Pray that they don't 'run scared' but that they will be able to deal with things as they arise."
3. Pray for their spiritual maturity "so that they'll be able to handle circumstances, know how to be God's spokesmen and interpret to their national brethren."

But this doesn't mean getting personally involved in local political situations. "The quickest and shortest way to an early grave in Latin America," the observer said, "is to get involved in politics."

Stanley, director of news and information services at the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, accompanied a group of Baptist editors on a recent tour of four middle America countries.