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Baptists, Jews Discuss
Evangelism And Survival

By Jim Newton

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--A national Baptist-Jewish dialogue grappled with Baptist concerns for evangelism and missions and Jewish concerns for survival, ending three days of candid discussions with a call for improved Baptist Jewish relationships.

"During the dialogue, we discovered areas where our self identities came into conflict, especially on Southern Baptists' understanding of the centrality of missions," said Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, national co-director of inter-religious affairs for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Eckstein observed the Baptist view of missions clashes with the very backbone of Jewish identity and the central issue of Jewish survival.

During an open discussion described as "the turning point" in the dialogue, Eckstein and others urged Baptists to publicly condemn the techniques of such organizations as Jews for Jesus, the American Board of Missions to the Jews, and Beth Sar Shalom, calling them "offensive."

In his opening address, Eckstein stressed Jewish commitment to "survival" in the light of the silence of the Christian world during the Nazi Holocaust and the 1967 Six Day War in Israel. In both cases, he said, the survival of Judaism was threatened.

Jews, according to Eckstein, view the survival of Israel very closely with the survival of the Jewish people, and since the Holocaust, Jews have become "obsessed" with survival.

Almost all of the Baptist speakers dealt with Baptist concepts of missions and evangelism.

Baptists cannot give up the emphasis on evangelism for "it is the very soul of our faith," insisted Leon McBeth, church history professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. "We do not regard our efforts to win other people, including Jews, to faith in Christ as anti-semitic and for sure in our hearts we do not intend it as such," McBeth said.

Both Bruce Corley, an assistant professor of New Testament at Southwestern Seminary, and Glenn Igleheart, director of the inter-faith witness department for the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board, pointed out that Baptists do not single out Jews as special, evangelism target groups, but neither do Baptists avoid evangelism efforts among Jews.

Several speakers, both Baptists and Jewish, urged the dialogue participants to avoid getting bogged down with their differences, and move instead toward specific steps to improve relationships.

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Igleheart and Eckstein, the program leaders for the two organizations sponsoring the dialogue offered the most comprehensive suggestion for steps to improve relations.

Igleheart suggested publication of papers from the dialogue in a joint Baptist-Jewish publication, emphasis by both Baptists and Jews on human rights, joint study programs for Baptist and Jewish seminaries, and a increased emphasis on communications, understanding, curriculum and service.

Igleheart also suggested grass roots level overseas travel to Israel, similar to a recent trip to Israel by SBC President Bailey Smith and a delegation of Baptist and Jewish leaders, and an expansion of Baptist-Jewish dialogue to a tri-logue involving Baptists, Jews and Moslems.

Eckstein proposed a national dialogue or conference every two or three years for Baptists and Jews, each in a different part of the country and focusing on a different topic.

He said future dialogues should seek to involve more lay people and those Baptists and Jews who are most apprehensive about dialogue, the Orthodox and Hassidic Jews and fundamentalist/conservative Southern Baptists, neither of which was widely represented in the dialogue.

Even though there have been four previous regional Baptist-Jewish dialogues, this was the first national dialogue sponsored jointly by the Anti-Defamation League and the HMB inter-faith witness department, prompting Eckstein to observe that Baptists-Jewish discussions are still in the infancy, or even "new birth" stage.

Rabbi Ronald Sobel of Temple Emmanu-El in New York City said the acceleration of Baptist-Jewish dialogue is a direct result of Jewish outrage and Baptist apology for remarks by SBC President Smith that "God Almighty does not hear the prayers of a Jew," which Smith made at a national political-religious conference in Dallas in 1980.

Much of the dialogue was devoted to papers outlining differences and similarities among Jewish and Baptist beliefs and practices.

Speakers pointed out that while Baptists view the scripture as the sole or supreme authority in matters of faith and practice, Jews do not accept this view of scripture, depending instead on the Torah, tradition and the collective teachings of Judaism for Jewish authority.

Corley pointed out that many Baptist ministers regard their authority coming directly from God, with revelation through God's Holy Spirit for their truth in preaching. In contrast, Jewish Theological Seminary professor Seymour Siegel said rabbis do not rely on any kind of direct charismatic communication with God, and if they claim this kind of revelation, no Jew would listen.

Several speakers pointed out that many things Baptists and Jews have in common, such as the Old Testament, appreciation for God's revelation through the Jewish people, belief in the same God, strong emphasis on local autonomy lack of one spokesman for their faith, commitment to religious liberty and separation of church and state and emphasis on human rights.

Siegel said one concept which has encouraged Jewish dialogue with Christians is the "double covenant idea" which suggests both Christianity and Judaism are true religions. Judaism is God's covenant with the nation of Israel while Christianity is God's covenant with the Gentiles, he said.

Both Siegel and Eckstein said Baptists and Jews should walk in parallel lines down separate paths, for ultimately at the end of time, these paths will converge.

"If Christians become better Christians and Jews become better Jews, together we would have a better world," Eckstein concluded.

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Dunn Laments Fundamentalist
Support Of Israel Prophecy

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FORTH WORTH, Texas (BP)--A Baptist expert on church-state separation warns against "a marriage of convenience between ardent Israelis and Christian fundamentalists," saying such Jews are in danger of becoming "pawns of prophecy or prospects for proselytizing."

Speaking at a Baptist-Jewish dialogue, James M. Dunn said such a marriage "looks like a marriage between sadists and masochists."

"A good many Christians who bear the label 'Baptists' see Jews in the nation of Israel as little more than pawns of prophecy, less than persons to be loved and valued for themselves," said Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington.

Many Zionists don't understand that such Christians believe Jews are predestined by God to be converted at the end of the world and that Jews are prospects to be checked off when converted to Christianity, Dunn said.

"The inerrancy interpreters of the Bible who take the geographic predictions literally and see the establishment of Israel as a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy are the same literalists who expect the conversion of all Jews to Christianity and a literal return of the Messiah to Jerusalem," Dunn said.

"You can't have one without the other," he warned. "It is a package deal."

Although Dunn pointed out that not all criticism of the nation Israel, is a "mark of anti-semitism," he admitted there is a "latent anti-semitism that does bother Baptists."

"Baptists need to remember that anti-semitic words and deeds need not be intentional, emotional or hostile to be destructive and accurately tagged as anti-semitic," Dunn said.

Dunn observed that the greatest strain placed on Baptist faith and faithfulness is "not so much from any external challenge, as from within. We are in real danger," he warned, "of being co-opted by the culture."

He decried growing materialism, installment buying, militarism that relies on weapons for national defense and uncritical nationalism.

Baptists sometime border "on idolatrous worship of state" which the new religious right has emphasized, he said.

"The fact that the television militants have recruited a good many of their foot soldiers from Baptist ranks is humiliating, embarrassing and an evidence of superficiality of our teaching and preaching," Dunn said. Such efforts reduce God to "no more than a national mascot," he charged.

Dunn called for Baptists and Jews to dedicate themselves "to those values that bind us together: love of freedom, compassion, justice and the pursuit of peace."

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FCC Lottery Could Throw ACTS Licenses To Chance

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Southern Baptists may find out in February how they will fare in the distribution of low-power television channels when the Federal Communications Commission announces its rules and procedures for the new broadcast service.

Congress has given the FCC until Feb. 1 to develop a plan to handle the more than 6,000 applications filed for the new channels. The Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission is one of the largest applicants, with 106 stations proposed as part of its American Christian Television System (ACTS).

The FCC stopped accepting low-power applications April 9, 1981, when it became apparent a streamlined licensing procedure would be needed to handle the unexpected number of applications.

One of the most controversial aspects of the licensing process is the FCC's plan for deciding between two applicants for the same channel in the same city. The FCC is expected to propose a system of random selection by lottery for awarding these "mutually exclusive" applications.

While the FCC traditionally has used lengthy, expensive legal hearings to compare competing applications, last August Congress authorized the lotteries to allow the FCC to speed up licenses.

Evidenced by response to the proposed lottery the broadcast industry is against it. The National Association of Broadcasters says a change to random selection would cause the FCC more administrative problems than it would solve.

The Radio and Television Commission in a comment filed with the FCC Dec. 28, also argued against the lottery, but for a different reason. The commission reminded the FCC that low-power was designed to increase the involvement of minorities and noncommercial broadcasters in television. The lottery, as planned by the FCC, would not give preference to such applicants.

The commission suggested that a lottery be used only as a last resort, and only after the competing applications for a particular channel are narrowed down to those representing minorities and those planning noncommercial service.

This would have a definite affect on the Radio and Television Commission's applications, since they are all for noncommercial stations and since the ACTS five-member board of directors includes three minority representatives. Of the commission's 106 applications, approximately 75 appear to have no competing applications at this time.

Another issue at stake in the FCC's rule making is the total number of low-power stations that can be owned by one applicant. The FCC has indicated it may place a 15-station limit on all applicants. But the commission has asked the FCC to apply such a limit to commercial applicants only, since the commission's plan is designed as a public service.

Radio and Television Commission President Jimmy R. Allen has said plans for the American Christian Television System will not be scraped if the network is allowed only a small number of stations. Other Southern Baptist entities will be able to apply for stations and carry the ACTS network programming, he said.

No one is predicting how long it will take the Federal Communication Commission to process all 6,000 applications once the rules and procedures are in place. It has said it will award the unopposed channels first, however.

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Reagan Race Proposal Stirs
Mixed Reaction In Congress

By Larry Chesser

WB

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WASHINGTON (BP)--President Reagan's announced support for legislation denying tax exempt status to private schools which practice racial discrimination is drawing mixed reactions from congressional leaders.

While both Republicans and Democrats welcomed the president's support for such legislation, the announcement only partially muted the concerns of some Democrats over his reversal of a 12-year-old Internal Revenue Service policy prohibiting tax exemption to private schools that discriminate on the basis of race.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., welcomed Reagan's support for legislation on the issue but warned that "The president's words do not undo the damage" caused by what Kennedy called the administration's "shocking action" of withdrawing the IRS regulations. The result, he said, restores "racist tax subsidies" until Congress acts to correct it.

Speaker of the House Thomas P. O'Neill Jr. appeared even less satisfied with administration actions. "What this country needs is not more legislation but the clear and unmistakable commitment of the president of the United States to enforce the law," he said.

Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., who announced plans to introduce his own legislation said Congress should work with the president to "ensure through law that the federal government does not subsidize racial discrimination through the tax code."

Republican leaders hailed Reagan's announcement, with Senate Finance Committee Chairman Robert J. Dole, R-Kan., indicating he would introduce the administration's bill as soon as it is drafted.

Dole called Congress "the proper forum" to set tax exemption policy. He predicted the matter would receive "priority attention" by Congress and his committee which he said would open hearings soon after Congress reconvenes Jan. 25.

It remains to be seen whether the administration's proposal will be as sweeping as the IRS policy it is designed to replace. Sen. J. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., has already raised reservations about how far such legislation should go.

Thurmond said "Any legislation that is proposed should in no way infringe upon freedom of religious belief and expression."

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee said "sincerely-held religious beliefs" were at issue in the Bob Jones University case--a tax exemption dispute pending before the Supreme Court when the IRS reversed its long-held policy.

Thurmond had hailed the IRS decision because of his view that Congress, rather than "bureaucratic agencies," should make laws and set public policy.

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