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Mormons Challenge
Baptist Missions

By Mike Creswell

RB

CARACAS, Venezuela (BP)--As La Hacienda Baptist Church began one worship service in a crowded second-floor apartment of a high-rise building, two young men in dark suits walked briskly past the apartment's open front door and headed up the stairs.

They were Mormon missionaries. While Baptists were witnessing on one floor, Mormons worked equally hard on another.

The scene is becoming increasingly common as Southern Baptist and Mormon missionaries work the same mission fields. Once, evangelical missionaries encountered only other evangelicals, Catholics, or members of indigenous religions. Today, Southern Baptist missionaries find themselves competing for members with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Unification Church (Moonies), and an assortment of other America-based bodies considered Christian deviation groups because of their blend of Christian and non-Christian concepts.

Undoubtedly the most active and successful group of this sort is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints--the Mormons.

They now have work in 83 countries and are the fastest-growing church in the United States of those having more than one million members. Membership in the LDS church is 4.6 million, with about one million of those members overseas. In 1980 they baptized 275,777 persons. Of this number, only about 65,000 were children baptized at eight years of age; the rest were converts.

For comparison, 13.5 million Southern Baptists in the United States baptized 429,742 persons during 1980, and Baptist churches overseas with whom Southern Baptist missionaries work baptized another 110,032. To have matched the Mormons in growth, the combined total would have to have been well over 800,000.

Over the past five years, Mormon membership has increased 93 percent in South America, 98 percent in Mexico, and 42 percent in Africa (though the numbers are relatively small). In the same five years, Baptists increased by 34.5 percent in South America, 9.2 percent in Mexico and 79.2 percent in Africa.

The real foot soldier underneath the glittering Mormon growth is the Mormon missionary. There are now about 30,000 of them worldwide, an impressive number, though short of church hopes. About 30 percent of 19-year-old Mormon men in North America volunteer to serve two years. Women may volunteer at age 21.

They are supervised closely (they must account for every hour) on the field by zone leaders and ultimately a mission leader who is himself a layman serving a three-year volunteer term. Only nine of every 1,000 homes visited will admit Mormon missionaries.

One mission leader who just completed an assignment in South Carolina was a Nevada dentist who returned home grumbling that Southern Baptists had not been responsive to Mormon proselyting efforts because "they believe the Bible is the only Word of God."

In the United States only a handful of informed church members have recognized the Mormons are non-Christian.

In fact, while a nationwide survey on religion showed most Southern Baptists give Sun Myung Moon (head of the Unification Church) uniformly negative ratings because of his strange teachings, they give Mormons uniformly positive ratings--this despite the fact that Mormon theology is as strange and non-Christian as "Moonie" theology.

Within the Southern Baptist Convention, the Home Mission Board has been charged with the task of helping Southern Baptists relate to Mormons. Department workers hold many training sessions and awareness conferences each year to help Baptists witness to Mormons without becoming "Mormonized" themselves.

Int resting things sometimes happen because of Mormonism's generally favorable public image. The Radio and Television Commission interviewed Donnie and Marie Osmond-- undoubtedly America's two best-known Mormons--on MasterControl in 1976. Immediately after its airing, commission president at the time, Paul M. Stevens, ordered the segment not to be used again.

The Baptist Sunday School Board announced Feb. 26 it would no longer market two Mormon-produced non-doctrinal films, "John Baker's Last Race" and "Cipher in the Snow." Through Broadman, the board marketed "Cipher" since 1975 and "Last Race" since 1977.

The Foreign Mission Board, also moving in recent years to meet the challenge of Mormonism, added courses on Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses to orientation provided new missionaries.

Southern Baptist missionaries report a variety of experiences with Mormons. Though missionaries maintain friendly relations with a wide range of evangelical groups, and in some cases, Catholics, they generally classify Mormons as non-Christian in terms of theology.

Because of Mormonism's incredibly complex system of beliefs, and because the group has given new definitions to every theological word used by Baptists (such as grace, salvation, God, born again, and more) and other words unique to them, study is required before even a seminary professor can witness effectively to Mormons.

The rapidly increasing numbers of Mormons on overseas mission fields strongly suggest they must be taken into account more fully in Southern Baptist mission strategies.

Southern Baptist missionaries in South America have been particularly conscious of an increasing Mormon presence in recent years. One missionary there said he avoids wearing white shirts and dark ties together, since this is the standard uniform worn by Mormon missionaries in hot climates.

"The Mormons look for any excuse to visit our missionaries and pastors," says James Bartley, missionary in Uruguay. He says they even visit to ask him to contact the United States by radio, so they can tell Uruguayan Baptists they "visit with the missionaries and the Bartleys." Through such an introduction the Mormons hope to sway the Baptists.

"The basic problem with Mormon theology," says Bartley, is that Mormons have a "very deficient and false concept of Christ. To the Mormons, Jesus is <one of the prophets,' but so was Joseph Smith Jr."

Missionary Ed Ables in Ecuador says Mormon mission strategy is to "go for the upper class. They want people with money and with leadership potential, people who will impress people."

Perhaps the greatest difference in mission strategies is illustrated by Ables' comment that if all Mormon and Southern Baptist missionaries left Ecuador, in a few years there would be nothing left of the Mormons, but Baptist work would continue because they have trained local leaders.

Southern Baptists Having
Identity Crises, Cole Says

By Larry Crisman

CO

COLUMBIA, S.C.(BP)--"Southern Baptists are in an identity crisis of major proportions," A. Harold Cole, recently retired executive secretary-treasurer of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, told more than 80 Baptists attending a semi-annual meeting of the South Carolina Baptist Historical Society.

"We are being told by some that we have been what we really never have been and that we are who we really are not," said Cole. "We have at this time no more urgent need than to grasp afresh who we are and what we are to do in the world."

Cole, who retired Feb. 28 after more than 12 years as South Carolina's top administrator, traced the history of Southern Baptists before identifying concerns which he believes confront the Southern Baptist Convention.

"Behind the battle over labels, competing leadership styles and the struggle for institutional control," said Cole, "lies an agonizing effort to decide what and who we really are."

Cole described Southern Baptists as a denomination that has progressed from "farm folk" to "the largest non-Catholic communion in America."

He said the growth has brought diversity and struggle for understanding.

"Baptists do not yet have the structures for understanding and accepting the dissimilarities and diversity that have to some degree always been with us, but more acutely in the past 40 years."

Differences and growth have brought problems, he explained.

"Perhaps the major problem is fundamentalism with its new code word of inerrancy. This time it is more sophisticated and has a master strategy to take over the Southern Baptist Convention by seizing control of its institutions," he said.

Cole praised Southern Baptist institutions, saying the seminaries have "preserved our continuity" and kept us from "veering off on tangents of one-sidedness."

"It is now time for the great majority of Southern Baptists who stand at the creative center of theology and biblical scholarship to rally to the aid of our institutions. I can understand their alarm. They need us."

Cole said it is time for Baptists to define clearly those "who would force a monolithic uniform theological stance on a conscience-free people who insist upon the competency of the individual before God."

"We can be brothers and sisters in Christ without all being indetical twin brothers and sisters," he said.

Cole said the convention's "regionism, racism and sexism need to go if we are faithful to the gospel and if we are to break out of our provincialism to grow up into a mature national denomination."

"To be specific, there is simply no way to take Bold Mission Thrust seriously by declaring the gospel only to Dixie and not to the other six regions of the United States."

Cole predicted the SBC will come through its controversies "perhaps purged and stronger."

"Evangelism and missions will continue to be the stackpoles around which we gather. In spite of the untraconservative mood of the country and times, we will begin in earnest to address the social and corporate dimensions of the Christian faith."

He said the "pervasive ferment among us now can serve a useful purpose if it forces us to re-examine our ultimate foundations, recapture our controlling vision and redefine the center that holds us together."

U.S. Now Wants High Court
To Settle Race Bias Fight

By Stan Haste

WB

WASHINGTON (BP)--Changing courses once more in what has become one of the most confusing church-state cases ever, the Reagan administration asked the Supreme Court Feb. 25 to decide if religious schools practicing race discrimination are entitled to tax-exempt status.

This latest action apparently means that the high court will decide the cases of Bob Jones University and Goldsboro (N.C.) Christian Schools after all, despite a Jan. 8 motion by the government that it be allowed to withdraw from the case.

That motion noted that the Justice Department had decided that an Internal Revenue Service practice dating to 1970 which denied tax exemption to such schools had not been authorized by Congress and that the schools denied such status under the rule should be reinstated as tax-exempt organizations. In addition, the motion asked the high court to nullify the decision of a federal appeals court in Richmond, Va. which had ruled against the schools.

Four days after filing the motion, however, President Reagan reacted to a storm of criticism over the move by announcing he would send a bill to Congress specifically authorizing IRS officials to implement a non-discriminatory policy in making decisions on tax exemptions to religious schools.

Members of Congress gave the President's proposal a luke-warm reception, many expressing the view that the dispute should be resolved by the Supreme Court. As support for Reagan's bill lagged, some members suggested in its place a congressional resolution, without force of law, to express the opinion of Congress that IRS should be permitted to deny tax-exempt status to schools practicing discrimination.

Congressional reaction, combined with a Feb. 18 order by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia directing the IRS not to grant or restore tax exemption to such schools, forced the government's hand. Assistant Attorney General Lawrence G. Wallace cited the lower court's action in requesting the Supreme Court to decide the matter.

In a separate document submitted to the high court, Wallace outlined the government's new views. When the case comes to argument, he indicated, the government will oppose Bob Jones University and Goldsboro Christian Schools in their claim that the IRS rule violates their free exercise of religion. But the government will agree with the schools that IRS lacked the legal authority to deny tax exemptions for race discrimination.

Wallace further suggested that in light of the government's new position, the court invite a third party, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to participate in oral arguments. He asked the court to grant the government 20 minutes of argument, with another 20 minutes each given to the schools and the third party.

But Bob Jones attorney William B. Ball objected to such a division of time, saying his side should be given half the allotted one hour.

With the new flurry of proposals and counter-proposals from both sides, the justices must now decide how to handle the complicated case. Their ground rules could be announced as early as March 1.

Three Men to Receive
Elizabeth Lowndes Award

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BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (BP)--Three sons of Southern Baptist missionaries will receive the 1981 Elizabeth Lowndes Award, given annually by Woman's Missionary Union to outstanding college graduates chosen from among children of Southern Baptist missionaries.

Timothy Wayne Randolph, Fort Worth, Texas; George Douglas Pringle Jr., Las Vegas, N.M.; and David James Roper, Chicago, Ill., will receive cash awards in recognition of their scholarship, leadership and character.

Candidates are nominated by the Home and Foreign Mission boards, and graduated during the previous school year.

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Randolph was graduated magna cum laude from Wayland Baptist College, where he was president of Alpha Chi, a national honor society, and was active in Baptist Student Union. A student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, he is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Wayn Randolph, home missionaries in Security, Colo.

Pringle is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Pringle, home missionaries in Las Vegas, N.M. He was graduated from New Mexico State University, where he was a member of Chi Epsilon, a civil engineering honor fraternity; Tau Beta Pi, an engineering honorary fraternity; and Phi Kappa, an honor society. He also was active in Baptist Student Union.

Roper was graduated summa cum laude from Furman University, where he was valedictorian of his graduating class. He was a member of Omicron Delta Kappa, a national leadership society and was Furman's representative to Algeria at the Model League of Arab States, which met in Washington, D.C. A graduate student at the University of Chicago, he is the son of John and Ruth Roper Jr., Southern Baptist representatives to Ajloun, Jordan.

The Elizabeth Lowndes Award was established in 1936 as a tribute to Mrs. W. C. Lowndes, treasurer of WMU for 36 years.

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RTVC Sweeps Angel Awards Program;
Wins Seven National Radio Honors

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3/1/82

HOLLYWOOD (BP)--It was Southern Baptist night when seven radio programs produced by the denomination's Radio and Television Commission won top honors in the national Angel awards, sponsored by Religion in Media.

Religion in Media is a world-wide interreligious, non-profit organization. The Angel awards annually recognize excellence in religious radio, television, film, records and books.

Seven RTVC programs were nominated for awards. Five of them won Silver Angels, the top award in their category. The other two won certificates of excellence, runnerup awards.

The five top winners were Country Crossroads, MasterControl, Horizontes, Hosanna USA and the Christmas Living Word radio spots.

Receiving certificates of excellence were Sounds of the Centurymen and On Track.

This is the second time that Country Crossroads and MasterControl have been honored with these national awards. Two years ago, the programs each received an Angel award for excellence in national radio.

The seven awards, the most even given to one organization by the Angel awards program, led the award presenters to call the Feb. 18 ceremonies "Southern Baptist night."

The awards were presented by David Hofer, president of the National Religious Broadcasters and Demos Shakarian, founder of the International Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship. Actor Dean Jones was master of ceremonies. Other presenters included Steve Allen, Jayne Meadows, Roy Rogers and Rhonda Fleming.

Country Crossroads features country music with co-host Bill Mack, a Fort Worth disc jockey, Jerry Clower, of the Grand Ole Opry, and a regular guest host. It is on 1,357 stations. MasterControl, heard on 891 stations, is a music interview program.

Horizontes is a half-hour Spanish-language program for young adults. A new program, it is on 52 stations. Hosanna USA was a religious special and the Christmas Living Word spots were 30 and 60 second scripture readings from the Living Bible. The spots were mailed to all radio stations in the nation.

Sounds of the Centurymen features sacred music from the Centurymen, a men's singing group founded by ther RTVC and is on 175 stations. On Track, the agency's newest program, has a format especially designed for Christian stations and features Christian contemporary recording artists. It was first aired in October and is already on 217 radio stations across the country.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Radio and Television Commission.)