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82-141

'Theology Is A Verb' Conference Sets Agenda

By Craig Bird

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (BP)—Southern Baptists seeking support and fellowship from "like-minded" pastors and laymen more concerned with major social issues than the political struggles within the Southern Baptist Convention got together Oct. 3-5.

More than 100 people from as far away as Texas and New York gathered in Charlotte for "a seminar on practical ministries for Southern Baptists" focusing on economic justice, women's rights and peacemaking.

The "Theology Is A Verb" conference was hosted by St. John's Baptist Church.

In informal discussion groups the conference decided on a four-point agenda two of which may be visible at the 1984 Southern Baptist Convention in Kansas City.

An effort will be made to "get the issues of economic justice, women's rights and peacemaking before a much broader group in Kansas City," and there is a possibility a national conference on Baptist women in ministry will meet during the 1984 convention.

Other agenda items included rallying Baptist support for an upcoming statement on nuclear disarmament from the United States Catholic bishops and drafting a "letter to the churches" to inform other congregations about what took place and what might happen in the future, conference participants said.

The Peacemaker, a group sponsored by Deer Park Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., is taking the lead in seeking the most effective way to share the group's concerns with a greater cross-section of Southern Baptists according to Carman Sharp, pastor of Deer Park church.

Sharp said the conference agreed to look at what the Catholic bishops had to say and, "in every community ask Baptists to affirm what parts of the statement they can—it would be a most unusual response for Baptists to make." Sharp also informed the conference of the need for a minimum of \$1,000 to set up a "Center on Peacemaking" at Deer Park as a peace resource center for individuals and churches seeking information on a Christian's role in peacemaking.

Members of the discussion group pledged \$500 of that amount, Sharp reported.

The push to form the women in ministry group has been "more vision than concrete until now," according to Nancy Sehested, associate minister at Oakhurst Baptist Church in Decatur, Ga., who is heading the steering committee on that project. "By the end of October we hope to have 15 or 20 people on the committee (there are four right now) and have a position paper written. Then within six months we hope to have regional or national conferences scheduled."

Sehested said the aim was "not to fall into the trap of factionalism. We want to make the group broad enough to include all women interested in Baptist ministry but narrow enough to deal with the problems women ministers are facing in the convention."

The organizers of the meeting worked from a list of approximately 200 names and included pastors, denominational leaders and laymen who shared common concerns according to Andy Loving of SEEDS (an anti-hunger effort operated at Oakhurst church).

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"I just got together with some other people like The Peacemaker and Nancy and sent out invitations," Loving said. "Some of the first people we talked to were from North Carolina and a group of pastors there agreed to help put it together at St. John's."

Loving said the group was particularly concerned the meeting not be viewed as "just another group responding to the current political controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention." Instead, he said he feels, "the political issues are important but they are dissipating so much energy other important things are going undone. The issues of the Charlotte conference have a different priority in the churches who attended than they have in the convention as a whole. We wanted to find a way to support the churches who want to do something about hunger, peace and women's rights."

Another motivation was a need for fellowship with "like-minded churches," according to Glen Hinson, a Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor who delivered the keynote address Monday evening. "These were bright people from churches with financial resources and a great potential for doing good," Hinson said. "But there was a great deal of talk about various churches going their own way and forgetting the Southern Baptist Convention because they feel isolated. They felt a need to hold hands."

Hinson's address, "One Baptist's Dream—a convention that is truly evangelistic, truly Catholic and truly Baptist," was a call for churches to remain in the convention and help make others aware of their concerns and ministries.

A second conference will meet Oct. 6-8, 1983, at Morningside Baptist Church in Atlanta.

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BJCPA Reaffirms Support
Of Free Exercise Rights

By Larry Chesser

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10/6/82

WASHINGTON (BP)—A reaffirmation of the free exercise of religion rights guaranteed by the First Amendment highlighted a two-day meeting of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs executive committee.

In a unanimously-adopted statement the Baptist Joint Committee underscored its "determination to safeguard the genuine free exercise rights of every U.S. citizen."

The statement further requested staff of the Washington, D.C.-based agency to "seek proper legislative and judicial avenues to protect and enhance the free exercise of religion of all citizens including that of elementary and secondary school children."

In other action the committee affirmed the Baptist Joint Committee's participation in the Brooks Hays Memorial Fund—an endowment set up to honor the late Baptist statesman and former congressman from Arkansas.

In addition to the BJCPA the Hays fund will be managed by representatives of Calvary Baptist Church, Washington, D.C.; Second Baptist Church, Little Rock, Ark.; the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Former Members of Congress Organization and the U.S. Capitol Historical Society. Interest from the fund will benefit these organizations and churches according to its chairman, Fred Schwengel, president of the Capitol Historical Society.

The BJCPA also agreed to focus on an affirmation of Baptist identity and heritage during its biennial religious liberty conference scheduled Oct. 3-4, 1983.

BJCPA executive director James M. Dunn, in his report, said the agency's 1983-84 priorities will include a "back-to-Baptist-basics" emphasis on such Baptist themes as soul freedom, a reinforcement of the Baptist Press bureau in the nation's capital, an expansion of a Baptist network of citizens concerned with public affairs issues and continued resistance of governmental intrusion into religious affairs.

The committee also approved a working 1982-83 budget of \$431,916 for the agency which represents nine Baptist denominations in the U.S. and Canada, including Southern Baptists.

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Bob Jones-Goldsboro Dispute
Dominates High Court Docket

By Stan Hasteley

WASHINGTON (BP)—The church-state docket of the U.S. Supreme Court, which returned to the bench Oct. 4 for its 1982-83 term, is dominated by the pending conflict between the Internal Revenue Service and Bob Jones University and Goldsboro (N.C.) Christian schools over tax-exempt status for the two schools.

While the high court announced on its first day back after a traditional summer recess that it will decide on the constitutionality of a Minnesota law providing tax deductions to parents who send their children to sectarian schools, its church-state agenda features one of the most highly publicized cases in recent years, the IRS flap with Bob Jones and Goldsboro over race discrimination policies.

Complicating the case for nearly a year has been the government's on-again, off-again decision to pursue the IRS's claim that revocation of Bob Jones' tax-exempt status and outright denial of the benefit to Goldsboro Christian Schools is mandated by civil rights laws barring discrimination in admissions and other school policies.

Few constitutional experts disagree with the view that the Internal Revenue Service possesses statutory authority under the Civil Rights Act to deny or revoke tax exemption when private, nonsectarian schools are found to discriminate.

But according to church-state attorneys that is not the issue. They maintain what distinguishes this case is precisely the religious argument made by the fundamentalist institutions that the IRS has neither the legal nor constitutional authority to penalize with loss or denial of tax exemption schools which discriminate on the basis of sincerely held religious beliefs.

What has perhaps most frustrated these constitutional authorities, who represent churches and umbrella church organizations from the whole theological spectrum of American religious life, is the failure of most reporters and commentators to make the distinction.

If the nine justices decide it on narrowly religious grounds, most reporters and commentators are likely to accuse the court of perpetuating racist institutions. If, however, they decide the case on the basis of the "compelling public interest" that elimination of race discrimination as a national objective outweighs the churches' interest in strict separation of church and state, Bob Jones, Goldsboro and others can safely be predicted to howl in outrage.

The tangled web clinging to the Bob Jones-Goldsboro case began in 1969 when the IRS announced, with the support of then president Richard M. Nixon, that it would thereafter deny tax exemption to schools that could not prove they did not discriminate on the basis of race.

Apparently forgotten is the fact that church groups, ranging from hardline fundamentalist to liberal establishment, protested that administrative decision vigorously.

But with the successive support of the Ford and Carter administrations, IRS refused to back down. In 1976 it revoked the tax-exempt status of Bob Jones University.

Officials at the Greenville, S.C., institution were encouraged, nevertheless, when presidential candidate Ronald Reagan promised during the 1980 campaign to reverse the IRS policy, a pledge generally unreputed by the media.

Last January Reagan made good on his promise when the Justice Department announced it wished to withdraw from the Bob Jones-Goldsboro case, while IRS indicated it would abandon its 12-year-old policy.

Those moves came on Jan. 8, the same day the Justice Department announced an historic anti-trust settlement with the American Telephone and Telegraph Co., thus removing from the courts one of the most complicated business law cases in history. The administration apparently hoped the AT&T settlement would so dominate the news that the Bob Jones-Goldsboro move would go relatively unnoticed.

But after a massive uproar resulted in one of the first genuine crises facing his administration, Reagan took to the airwaves to announce he was sending a bill to Congress making plain no school that discriminated in its racial policies would receive tax exemption in the future.

At the Supreme Court the government entered a new request that the court decide Bob Jones-Goldsboro after all, indicating it would take the position that while IRS had exceeded its authority under the law in revoking and denying the schools' tax exemption the institutions had no constitutional grounds to support their policies.

Acting on a separate motion the justices also agreed to invite veteran civil rights attorney William T. Coleman Jr. to argue the legality under civil rights statutes of the IRS policy initiated in 1969.

The case was to be argued Oct. 12 with a decision expected no sooner than the end of the year or perhaps as late as next spring.

By deciding to hear the Minnesota tax deduction case the court signaled its willingness to face head-on once again the thorny constitutional problem of how much and what kind of public aid may flow to parochial schools.

The contested Minnesota law provides annual state income tax deductions of \$500 and \$700 respectively for each child enrolled in elementary and secondary church-related schools. It has been upheld by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals.

The high court will reopen church-state arguments aired in 1973 when in *Committee for Public Education vs. Nyquist*, a 6-3 majority struck down a New York law providing tuition tax credits against state income taxes owed.

Proponents of parochial aid will argue the Minnesota law is fundamentally different from the stricken New York statute in that tax deductions do not represent as direct a form of assistance as do tax credits.

But a wide range of religious denominations and umbrella organizations can likewise be predicted to enter the case on the argument that either scheme unconstitutionally aids religion and invites excessive governmental entanglement in religious affairs (82-195, *Mueller vs. Allen*).

In other church-state actions taken on its first day back on the bench the high court:

--Refused to grant a petition to a McLean, Va., woman who sought to block payment of salaries to chaplains of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives (82-112, *Inre Anne Neamon*);

--Declined to disturb a California court's ruling that a former member of a Jewish congregation which dismissed its rabbi may take the congregation to court over the dismissal action (82-96, *Sinai Temple vs. Superior Court of California for County of Los Angeles*);

--Let stand a lower court ruling that Herbert J. Armstrong's Ambassador College was legally obligated to disclose detailed financial information in a suit brought by the sole heir of a woman the heir claimed was unduly and fraudulently influenced to deed over a piece of property to the school shortly before her death (82-136 *Ambassador College vs. Geotzke*);

--Left in place a Louisiana blue law exempting grocery and drug stores but not hardware stores from Sunday closing laws despite substantial overlap in their inventories (81-2299, *Harry's Hardware, Inc. vs. Parsons*).

Helicopter Crash Kills
Baptist Political Leader

ITAPETINGA, Brazil (BP)—Cleriston Andrade, 56, a Brazilian Baptist political candidate and champion of the poor, died Oct. 1 in a helicopter crash reportedly caused by bad weather.

A candidate for governor of the state of Bahia, Andrade was on a campaign trip when the crash occurred. Two national congressmen and 10 others also died.

Andrade's death came two weeks before scheduled celebration of Brazilian Baptists' Centennial in Salvador, capital of Bahia and site of the nation's first Baptist church. As mayor of Salvador from 1970 to 1975, Andrade worked to improve services in poor areas of the city.

"Law is above all an attempt to practice justice, to defend and protect those who have no chance," Andrade stated in 1981. A member of Graca Baptist Church in Salvador he also participated in that congregation's ministries to the poor.

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Strict Drunk Driving
Bill Enactment Urged

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10/6/82

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—A new bill authorizing financial incentives for states which enact stricter drunk driving laws provides the needed leverage to get drunk drivers off the road, Ronald D. Sisk says.

The bill, just passed by Congress and awaiting President Ronald Reagan's signature, includes authorization for \$125 million in basic and supplemental grants over the next three years for states which adopt and implement effective programs to reduce traffic safety problems caused by drunk drivers. The money must be used only to implement and enforce such programs.

"This bill is of major importance," said Sisk, director of program development for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission. "Every concerned Southern Baptist ought to be on the phone to his or her legislator urging their state laws be brought into compliance with the provisions of this bill. Obviously drunk driving is a moral and not a financial issue but those of us who battle against the immorality of drunk driving will now have money on our side as well."

The standards set forth in the bill require suspension of a driver's license for at least 90 days on the first offense and one year on repeat offenses for driving while intoxicated or for refusing to submit to an intoxication test. The bill sets one-tenth of one percent minimum blood-alcohol content as legal proof of intoxication.

The state also must call for a mandatory 48-hour jail sentence or at least 10 days of community service for anyone convicted of drunk driving more than once in any five-year period. Increased enforcement and publicity of drunk driving laws is required.

"The bill also provides funds for a National Driver Register which would give state law enforcement officials an accurate record of a driver's previous offenses," Sisk said. "This system will be crucial in aiding detection of repeat offenders."

The states may also be eligible for additional money if they meet other criteria to be established by the secretary of transportation. Suggested criteria includes raising the legal drinking age to 21, impounding vehicles of convicted drunk drivers, establishing a state-wide driver record-keeping system and providing programs of education and rehabilitation.

"Concerned Christians should realize getting drunk drivers off the road is only part of the problem," Sisk said. "Along with tougher enforcement we need proper facilities to help those who are convicted to deal with the problem. Sticking an habitual drunk in jail doesn't make him any less a drunk."

"Christians believe in a whole gospel for persons," Sisk said. "We need a balanced, comprehensive approach. This bill encourages stricter enforcement. Education and prevention should also be part of our efforts," he said.

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