



- - BAPTIST PRESS

News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE

SBC Executive Committee
901 Commerce #750
Nashville, Tennessee 37203
(615) 244-2355
Wilmer C. Fields, Director
Dan Martin, News Editor
Craig Bird, Feature Editor

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W. Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 511 N. Akard, Dallas, Texas 75201-3355, Telephone (214) 720-0550
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Stan L. Hastey, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

January 16, 1986

86-4

Baptists Called To Practice Beliefs About Unsaved, Hell

By Linda Lawson

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Southern Baptists believe that lost people are going to hell, but they are not living out the conviction by making soulwinning a priority, three Southern Baptists leaders say.

Roy Edgemon, director of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board's church training department; Harry Piland, director of the BSSB Sunday school department, and Robert Hamblin, vice-president for evangelism at the Home Mission Board, decided to speak out after they met together for planning, discussions and prayer. They said they have agreed to increase cooperative efforts to lift up the concerns of a lost and hurting nation in need of the gospel.

"We are just about 18 inches, the distance from the head to the heart, from winning a lost world to Christ," said Edgemon. "If we could get in our hearts what we know is true theologically--that people who are lost are going to hell and are separated from God--our people and churches would be penetrating society with the good news of salvation in Christ."

Hamblin said churches are spending so much time and energy ministering to their own people that they have neither the time nor the inclination to be concerned about the needs of people who are not Christians. "We find a lot of satisfaction in ministering to ourselves and are not penetrating the world as we should," he said.

Piland said many churches growing numerically may be believe they are evangelizing lost people when, in fact, they are almost exclusively gaining members from other churches.

For example, he cited 1984 baptisms of 372,028. Of that number, he said approximately 199,000 were persons under 17 which primarily would represent conversions of children of church members, or biological growth. Of the remaining 173,000, between 40-55,000 were persons baptized from other denominations, leaving 124-140,000 persons reached from non-Christian homes by a denomination of 14-million members, Piland said.

The three outlined their concerns and announced their greater commitment to greater cooperation at a time Southern Baptists are launching a five-year effort to train one million Sunday school workers to witness and final preparations are under way for Good News America simultaneous revivals in March and April.

They emphasized their belief that more Baptists need to grasp the "awfulness" of being condemned to separation from a loving God for eternity. This awarness will create a compassion for the lost and will motivate individuals and churches to make evangelism their top priority, they said.

Piland said, "We may rush to the aid of persons trapped in fires or injured in accidents, but, at the same time, our next door neighbors do not know Christ as their Savior," said Piland. "We live as if we believe these persons are not going to hell."

To lead church members to a greater awareness of the needs of unsaved persons, Hamblin urged pastors to emphasize the concern in their sermons. "We need to talk about the consequences of sin and lead people to get under the burden of the love of Christ for lost people," he said.

Edgemon urged increased emphasis on training people to witness, including use of the church training module, Training Sunday School Workers in Evangelism.

--more--

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
Historical Commission, SBC

"I never met anyone I could not train to witness, to share their faith, and to use a marked New Testament to show the plan of salvation if they were willing to do it," he said.

Also, churches which make evangelism their priority cannot be easily damaged or destroyed by dissension, Edgemon noted. "If churches would center on winning people to Christ, they would see spinoffs in stronger relationships, stewardship and missions support," he added.

Hamblin, Piland and Edgemon emphasized they will work together in emphasizing through their programs the ultimate tragedy of not knowing Christ as Savior and the necessity of Baptists making evangelism their top priority.

This will take place through printed materials, speaking engagements, field service events, conferences at state and SBC levels and through leading denominational employees to even greater efforts at modeling a witnessing lifestyle.

"We are redoubling our efforts in person-to-person witness training programs at the Home Mission Board," said Hamblin.

"Our inability to become obsessed with the lostness of the lost ... is eating the heart out of our convention," said Piland. "At the same time I believe we can turn things around and win our nation to Christ."

Edgemon said, "Our burden is so strong. We know people are lost. We must penetrate society with the news that it was the love of God who called for the sacrifice to save mankind from hell."

--30--

High Court To Refine Limits
Of Free Exercise Of Religion

By Stan Hastey

Baptist Press
1/16/86

WASHINGTON (BP)--After hearing oral arguments in two church-state cases, the U.S. Supreme Court appears ready to refine further the constitutional balance between the free exercise of religion and the government's need to regulate the military and the Social Security system.

In one dispute, an Air Force captain who is a practicing Orthodox Jew, tried to convince the high court justices in oral arguments Jan. 14 that his right to exercise the longstanding Orthodox practice of wearing a yarmulke--or skull cap--while on duty as a psychologist in a military hospital outweighs the military's need to enforce its uniform regulations.

Simcha Goldman, who wore the skull cap on duty for four years before being instructed to remove it, argued through his attorney, Nathan Lewin, of Washington, that accommodation of religious freedom rights of military personnel should be protected in much the same way as are those of civilians. But Lewin ran into a barrage of pointed questions from several of the justices, including William H. Rehnquist, who lectured the attorney that previous cases testing free exercise applied only to civilians.

Lewin countered that in some previous cases on other claimed rights by military personnel, the court has ruled that the Bill of Rights protects them as well as civilians.

But Lewin also ran into tough questioning from William J. Brennan Jr., the court's senior member whose libertarian views often contrast with those of the conservative Rehnquist. Brennan wanted to know if the military might have to make further exceptions to its uniform regulations if adherents of other sects whose headdress is more elaborate and conspicuous claimed the same right. Lewin admitted that much of his case was built on the fact that the yarmulke is a small and inconspicuous religious adornment.

Making the government's case, Justice Department attorney Kathryn A. Oberly noted that the number of military personnel seeking exemptions from uniform regulations for religious purposes is "constantly growing." She argued that while she was not suggesting that the court should "abdicate to (the military's) judgment" Pentagon officials nevertheless have the obligation to preserve the discipline and morale of military personnel.

--more--

Answering a separate question from Thurgood Marshall, Oberly acknowledged that while "soldiers don't lose their First Amendment rights in the military," those rights "are applied differently." She then asked the justices not to "intervene precipitously" in an area she said the Constitution leaves to the legislative and executive branches of the government.

In the other case, the court heard Justice Department deputy solicitor general Kenneth S. Geller, argue that the family of a five-year-old American Indian girl is not entitled to the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children program or to food stamps because the child's father refuses to allow her Social Security number to be used for identification purposes.

Geller said the "integrity" of the Social Security system would be at stake if individual citizens who claim religious exemptions are allowed not to participate.

Stephen J. Roy, father of the child, Little Bird of the Snow, argued through attorney Gary S. Gildin, of Carlisle, Penn., that the government has not been able to prove that exempting his daughter would cripple the system. In the absence of such "compelling governmental interest," Gildin argued, the state must respect Roy's free exercise of religion.

The cases are expected to be decided before the end of the high court's current term in early July.

--30--

Supreme Court Rejects
Church Of Christ Fight

Baptist Press
1/16/86

WASHINGTON (BP)--Two elders in a local Church of Christ dispute over control of church property lost their final legal appeal Jan. 13, when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear arguments that they--not the entire congregation--have authority to decide who their minister and elders will be.

Mannie Black and Moses Williams, elders of the Liberty City (Fla.) Church of Christ, argued throughout their two-year legal battle in state courts and in two appeals to the nation's high court that they possessed sole authority to hire and fire a minister and to control the congregation's purse strings.

When they sought to dismiss their minister, Freeman T. Wyche, the congregation rebelled, voting to retain him and to discharge instead the two trustees.

Black and Williams then sought relief at trial, contending Church of Christ doctrine vests such authority in the elders, not in the whole congregation. But Wyche disputed that claim, arguing church polity is congregational in nature, leaving final decisions to the entire body.

After the trial court ordered a new vote to decide the dispute finally, the congregation once more voted to retain Wyche and discharge the trustees. A Florida appeals panel affirmed the congregational vote. It was that ruling Black and Williams unsuccessfully appealed to the Supreme Court.

--30--

Angolan Rebels Hold Two
Brazilian Missionaries

Baptist Press
1/16/86

HUAMBO, Angola (BP)--Angolan guerrilla fighters apparently are holding two Brazilian Baptist missionaries they kidnapped Dec. 31.

Miriam and Margarida Horvath, who are sisters, were seized New Year's Eve near the city of Huambo in Angola by guerrillas belonging to UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola). UNITA is fighting the Marxist government of the African nation and the Cuban troops stationed there, but the motive for the kidnapping is unclear.

--more--

The two missionaries, identified as members of the "Baptist Church of Brazil" by United Press International, are not sponsored by the Brazilian Baptist Convention, Brazil's largest Baptist group and the one to which Southern Baptist missionaries relate. The convention does support two other missionaries in Angola, however. Two Southern Baptist missionaries, Curtis and Betty Dixon of Oklahoma, also work in the country.

"If past practice holds, UNITA probably won't say anything further until the hostages reach rebel headquarters several weeks from now," UPI reported Jan. 15.

--30--

Youth Ministers Meet
Throughout Country

By Jim Lowry

Baptist Press
1/16/86

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--Hundreds of youth ministers gathered in more than 70 locations Monday, Jan. 13, for the first Youth Ministry Live Teleconference on BTN (Baptist Telecommunication Network).

Richard Ross, youth ministry coordinator in the church administration department at the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, was host for the evening teleconference, which featured Merton Strommen, founder of Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minn., and a leading researcher on the Christian beliefs of young people.

Strommen opened the program by presenting some personal insights to the youth ministers regarding current social trends which should affect methods of ministering to youth.

After the initial remarks, approximately 40 minutes of the one-hour teleconference was devoted to 32 questions called in from youth ministers viewing the program.

Questions dealt with the age of youth ministers, stereotypes faced in their ministry, available resources, serious problems and confidentiality, the role of women and strategies for dealing with drugs.

One of the most significant areas of discussion related to involving parents of youth in the work of youth ministers. Ross said many youth ministers in the denomination are expanding their ministries to include parents because of evidence of increased effectiveness.

At Greensboro, N.C., out of a group of approximately 100, 40 were parents of youth in the church. Some of the discussion in the teleconference centered on what parents can do to help youth ministers work with youth. One of the options suggested was parent training sessions to increase support for youth ministry.

Ross said he believes the teleconference represented one of the largest gatherings of youth ministers, although exact participation is not known. He said several youth ministers wrote to him prior to the teleconference to indicate they would have groups participating in the teleconference. From those letters, Ross said there would be at least 1,100 persons viewing the conference. When questions were called in, several other large groups were reported.

The trends reported by Strommen included an increased secularization of society, in which families rarely talk about God or religion in the home. He said except for Southern Baptists, there is a general decline in Sunday school attendance by youth throughout the United States.

Strommen also addressed the problem of youth and the lifestyles they practice today, especially those related to drug and alcohol abuse. He said in the 60s and 70s drug abuse by young people decreased at least 20 times while marijuana use increased 30 times. In the last 25 years, Strommen said suicides by young people have tripled.

Other trends Strommen discussed were the changing role of women, growth in minority populations, changes in the nature of the family and an epidemic increase in the number of hurting people.

--more--

Strommen closed by offering a trend of encouragement for the youth ministers. He said there was increasing evidence today of a growing interest in religion by youth. Strommen challenged the youth ministers by saying they did not "have the luxury of carrying on business as usual," noting the trends he has discovered call for action from concerned adults and youth ministers.

At the end of the session, Ross said youth ministers have "a unique calling. A lot of adults have committed a significant portion of their lives to ministering to youth. All of society is watching to see what will happen to today's teenagers."

States which were represented by callers included South Carolina, West Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Maryland and Oklahoma. Ross said other states also had groups participating in the teleconference.

--30--

Virginia Executive
Announces Retirement

Baptist Press
1/16/86

RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--Richard M. Stephenson, executive director of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, has announced he will retire Feb. 27, 1987, after 19 years in the post, the longest tenure in Virginia Baptist history.

Stephenson became chief executive for Virginia Baptists in January 1968, coming from Columbia Baptist Church, Falls Church, Va., where he had been pastor 17 years.

He is a native of Southampton County, Va., and grew up in Millfield Baptist Church, Blackwater Association. He graduated from Hampden-Sydney College and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., and was ordained by his home church in 1944.

The executive, who will be 65 in December 1986, met and married Noralee Mellor during his first pastorate at First Baptist Church, Fort Myers, Fla. Their two daughters are attorneys and their son is a United States foreign service officer.

Speaking of his "noble" birthday, Stephenson said: "Like one of old, I can say, 'eye hath not dimmed, nor natural strength abated' (with the obvious exception of glasses to read by)."

"Yet," he continued, "I feel that I should retire from this position of leadership. This will give ample time for the constitutional process of selection of another leader to take my place...."

It is anticipated board chairman Sherrill G. Stevens will name a special committee to bring a recommendation to the General Board. The General Board is charged with presenting nominations to the Baptist General Association.

--30--

