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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

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March 14, 1986

86-36

**Christians Face Temptations  
In Overseas Job Assignments**

By Art Toalston

EL PASO, Texas (BP)--In some overseas countries, Americans from lower middle-income brackets "live like kings with chauffeur-driven cars, large homes and maids."

That's a problem, as Chuck Anderson sees it, if they're professing Christians.

The percentage of Christians who go overseas on job assignments and who also continue in their Christian lifestyle is disturbingly low, says Anderson of El Paso, Texas.

With three young sons, Anderson and his wife, Mary, headed to the Netherlands Antilles near Venezuela nearly 15 years ago. He was to be the quality control manager, supervising about 100 workers, at an electronics instruments plant on one of the islands.

"We were picked up at the airport by some company personnel and deposited in a resort hotel...and kind of abandoned," Anderson says, noting he and his family needed "some input from a Christian perspective" in adjusting to life in a foreign country.

Even though he had seminary training, "my first inclination on being overseas and having an income and a management position several rungs higher than I would have had in the States, was to let down in my Christian life somewhat."

Several characteristics of an overseas work assignment could tend to push a person in that direction, Anderson says. First, an overseas assignment usually entails salary bonuses, yet living costs are lower in most areas, especially with favorable exchange rates for the U.S. dollar. Thus there's "the opportunity to move up several levels from the standpoint of luxury in living."

Instead of "taking advantage of what could have been an opportunity to minister with an increased income," many churchgoers "spend it all on themselves," he says.

Then, the overseas job often requires at least six days of work each week and "a lot of people feel like, 'Sunday is the only day I have off and...I don't want to spend half the day in church,'" Anderson says. "They're under so much pressure at work that they want that day to relax."

Although Anderson succumbed briefly to the temptation, before long, he and his wife began English-language Bible classes in their home. He taught adults and his wife taught children. He also distributed Bibles and helped persuade the U.S. Gideons organization to print 10,000 copies of the New Testament in Papiemento, the dialect on the island where he worked.

Anderson since has held management positions in factories in El Salvador twice and Mexico once. Each time, his family also relocated. It was in El Salvador where the couple first encountered Southern Baptist missions, through the literature work of Bill and Libby Stennett.

Today the Andersons are members of First Baptist Church of El Paso, where she is education secretary and he, as a volunteer, is church librarian and active in various ministries.

Laity Abroad, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's channel for assisting people who are or will be living, working, studying or traveling abroad, gets high marks from the Andersons. Often, contact is arranged with missionaries or local believers in the host country. Brochures detailing Laity Abroad are available from the board.

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**SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL  
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES**  
Historical Commission, SBC  
Nashville, Tennessee

A program like Laity Abroad helps both husband and wife learn about the culture from missionaries and local Christians, rather than just getting their indoctrination from the company.

"When the husband gets overseas, he immediately is immersed in his work...and the people he works with help him adjust to the culture, while the wife is generally left on her own to find her own way around," Mary Anderson says.

The Laity Abroad program also helps families find Christian friends and a good church to attend, as well as avenues of Christian witness in their host country, she says.

An "international economy" is developing, Anderson says, "and the opportunities are going to multiply for business people to work overseas."

People need to have their "house in order" before accepting overseas assignments, he says. They should prepare for "pressures regarding their Christian walk that they haven't experienced in the United States."

"They ought to go with their minds made up in advance," he says, "to use this opportunity as if God has sent them there for purposes of ministry...in spite of the opportunities to do otherwise."

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Nicaragua Volunteer Condemns  
U.S. Policy, Baptist Response

By Erich Bridges

Baptist Press  
3/14/86

MANAGUA, Nicaragua (BP)--Declaring he can "keep quiet no longer," a Southern Baptist volunteer in Nicaragua has condemned U.S. government support for the Nicaraguan contra guerrilla movement and what he calls Southern Baptists' "polite evasion" of the issue.

"I am moved as a volunteer representative of our mission work in Nicaragua to personally condemn any further assistance to the counterrevolutionaries because to continue that aid violates our national law and international law, (and) it continues sustained persecution of our Baptist family," wrote Douglass Sullivan, 29, in an "open letter" to Don Kammerdiener, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's work in Middle America and the Caribbean.

Copies of the letter, dated March 10, were sent to Foreign Mission Board President R. Keith Parks; the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs and the Baptist World Alliance, among others.

Sullivan, a Tennessean, has taught church history and ethics at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Managua since August 1984. He explained in his letter that he had remained silent as long as he could, wishing to honor the board's "tradition" of political neutrality. But he wrote that he had "long since tired (of) participating in the memorial services of innocent children and parents who have become victims to the horrible criminals which our government supports."

He claimed the contras have killed at least five Baptists and are responsible for closing four Baptist churches and destroying several Baptist health clinics.

Sullivan also charged the Foreign Mission Board and Southern Baptist Executive Committee have "politely evaded any direct, prophetic challenge" to U.S. government policy and avoided substantive response to appeals for political intercession from Nicaraguan Baptist leaders, the Baptist World Alliance and Argentine Baptists.

In a written reply to Sullivan dated March 13, Kammerdiener acknowledged the volunteer's feelings are shared by many people in both Nicaragua and the United States, "and I have no doubt they are a sincere indication of your commitment to the cause of Christ."

Kammerdiener stated, however, political neutrality for Southern Baptist missionaries worldwide is "more than a mere tradition and more than simply evading the realities of our day. In point of fact, it is a clearly stated policy of the Foreign Mission Board not to become involved in political controversy."

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The board has maintained a policy of political noninvolvement. It urges more than 3,600 Southern Baptist missionaries in 106 countries to refrain from activities or statements which either support or undermine governments or opposition groups. Following that policy, mission board officials believe, is the best way to continue serving people in countries ruled by rightist dictatorships, leftist regimes and everything in between.

"You and I spent considerable time prior to your going to Nicaragua discussing the reasons for this policy, and at one time you indicated that you felt it was the right policy for you," Kammerdiener wrote.

Sullivan first went to Nicaragua independently at the invitation of Nicaraguan Baptists but later applied and was accepted into the Foreign Mission Board's Mission Service Corps volunteer program. His original one-year Mission Service Corps term was extended through July 1986.

Southern Baptists sponsored career missionaries in Nicaragua from 1976 to 1982, but they left on the recommendation of Nicaraguan Baptists as anti-American feeling intensified. The Foreign Mission Board has continued to relate to the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua, providing relief aid for war refugees and assistance in literature ministries.

In his letter, Sullivan cited a 1984 request from Argentine Baptists that the Southern Baptist Convention urge the U.S. government to speed up dialogue with Nicaragua to bring peace to the region. Sullivan said Foreign Mission Board leader Parks "weakly responded" when he replied that the mission board's entry into foreign policy debate could jeopardize the work and safety of Southern Baptist missionaries.

Such a response, said Sullivan, "leaves open to question to our Latin American brothers and sisters the possibility of a hidden political agenda within the Southern Baptist Convention and its personnel."

That challenge to Southern Baptist motives "must not go unanswered," Kammerdiener replied. "As a matter of fact, there exists the possibility of 'hidden agendas' on all sides of an argument."

Taking a stand on either side of the Nicaraguan war, he said, would open the mission organization to charges that it supports the actions of one or the other. The Sandinistas and contras both stand accused of widespread civil and human rights abuses.

"The Foreign Mission Board is not willing to make such a choice," Kammerdiener said.

If the board is to make pronouncements on political conflicts and tragedies, the mission official asked, "where does the list begin and where does it end? By speaking to one issue such as that in Nicaragua, would we not also communicate feelings by the absence of a statement relative to equally or perhaps greater tragedies occurring in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, Ethiopia, Haiti, the Philippines or any number of other countries that might be mentioned?"

"Furthermore, how shall we reflect the equally sincere opinions of other Nicaraguan Christians who, with equal fervor and intensity, have come to exactly the opposite conclusions as have you?"

Kammerdiener denied the nonpolitical policy was "easy" or designed to avoid conflict. "As a matter of fact, it leaves us exposed to criticism from all sides." But, he said, "It is the policy which seems right to my conscience."

Sullivan's letter arrived during the height of President Reagan's battle with Congress for renewed military and humanitarian aid to the contras. Nicaraguan Baptist leaders consistently have opposed such support, issuing "pastoral letters" in 1984 and 1985 urging world Baptists to help change U.S. policy. Sullivan said the Baptist convention's board of directors sent a cablegram to both houses of Congress March 10 calling for an immediate halt to further contra aid.

Nicaraguan Baptist leaders also have been generally friendly to the Sandinista government, though opinions among Baptists at the local church level vary widely. Some Baptist churches and many families have split over the issue of supporting the Sandinistas, Nicaraguan pastors acknowledge.

Divisions of opinion reportedly mark other Protestant groups as well, especially in the wake of recently reported arrests and interrogations of several Nicaraguan evangelical leaders. Charges of religious repression and harassment by the government have been leveled in recent months by the Evangelical Pastors' Council, Campus Crusade for Christ, Child Evangelism Fellowship, the Nicaraguan Bible Society and the Assemblies of God, as well as the U.S.-based National Association of Evangelicals.

No such public complaints have come from Nicaraguan Baptists. Baptist leaders and several other Protestant groups in the country have said such allegations of government abuses are exaggerated and designed to influence U.S. policy.

Division also continues on a wider scale among Nicaragua's Roman Catholics, whose leader, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, is the most powerful domestic opponent of the Sandinistas.

A native of Chattanooga, Tenn., Sullivan received the bachelor of arts degree from Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., and the master of divinity and master of theology degrees from Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary.

He speaks fluent Spanish and worked in Mexico in 1976 in Texas Baptists' Rio Grande River Ministry program. He served as summer youth director at churches in Alabama and Mississippi and was interim pastor of Covenant Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. Members of the Covenant congregation have helped support Sullivan financially during his time in Nicaragua.

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Former Lay President Cooper  
Responds To Criswell Comments

Baptist Press  
3/14/86

YAZOO CITY, Miss. (BP)—The last layman to serve as Southern Baptist Convention president has responded with "consternation" to another former president who has said the pastor is the "ruler" of the church.

"Sweeping statements that the pastor is the 'ruler' of the church and thus making subservient vessels of other church members cannot go unchallenged or unanswered," said Owen Cooper of Yazoo City, Miss., SBC president from 1972 to 1974.

Cooper referred to a comment made by W.A. Criswell, pastor of First Baptist Church of Dallas and SBC president from 1968 to 1970, during the closing session of the "School of the Prophets" at First Baptist of Dallas in late February.

In response to a question about "shared ministry" between pastors, church staff and laypeople, Criswell said: "A laity-led, layman-led, deacon-led church will be a weak church anywhere on God's earth. The pastor is the ruler of the church. There is no other thing than that in the Bible."

In a prepared statement, Cooper asked if lay leadership is unbiblical when it is used to challenge the authority of a pastor who is acting in an un-Christian manner or when it counters pastoral authority which "is used to destroy faith in the Bible or undermine the support of the SBC."

"Obviously there are exceptions, and where to draw the line as to proper 'rulership' in a church can be a matter of endless debate, and conjecture," Cooper said.

However, he cited historical precedent: "Baptists have traditionally interpreted as biblical the 'priesthood of all believers' and the lack of distinction among the people of God. They have recognized there are different functions within the 'laos' (laity), but there is no priestly or authoritative class. According to Baptist traditions, such a position itself is unscriptural."

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"To say that 'a lay-led, laymen-led, deacon-led' church will be a weak church anywhere on God's earth is a mis-statement," he noted, adding such a statement ignores Baptist lay forefathers who led in establishing churches in Europe and later in American, and it ignores lay-led work on many mission fields.

Cooper praised "those pastors who follow the role model of Christ who came to serve and not be served, who describe themselves as meek and lowly, who refuse all attempts at making him a 'ruler.'"

But he said the "tragedy of such a statement" as Criswell's is that "many pastors, young and old, who hold as a role model the pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, will seek to exercise the unbiblical role as 'ruler' in their local church. Soon some will find themselves without a church over which to exercise their lordship. I wonder at whose feet the fault of their churchless condition will be laid."

Asking, "What is a weak church?" Cooper answered: "No church is weak whose foundation is deep enough to be resting upon the New Testament doctrines of the church; no church is weak that is broad enough to include in its program worthy participation in activities of meeting the spiritual and human needs of those hurting at home and around the world; and no church is weak that is high enough to reach the throne of God.

"The strength of the church is not represented by the number of members, the size of its budget or the authority of its pastor," he insisted. "The strength of a church is in direct proportion to the extent the Holy Spirit empowers the members of the church to carry out the Great Commission, beginning in Jerusalem; and to help hurting humanity, in the name of Christ, wherever the hurting may be found."

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\$22.8 Million Goal  
Set By Texas WMU

Baptist Press  
3/14/86

DALLAS (BP)--Texas Baptists will strive to reach a once-in-a-lifetime state missions giving goal of \$22.8 million for the Mary Hill Davis Centennial Offering.

The unprecedented state missions offering goal was set at the March meeting of the executive board of Texas Woman's Missionary Union.

The 1986 Mary Hill Davis Centennial Offering is the second of the "triple/triple" challenge to Texas Baptists in celebration of the Baptist General Convention of Texas centennial and in support of Mission Texas.

Through the Mary Hill Davis Centennial Offering for state missions, Texas Baptists are seeking to raise \$30 million to achieve the Mission Texas goal of helping existing churches start 2,000 new churches and missions by 1990. The strategy adopted last year to raise the \$30 million was to triple the 1984 goal in 1985 and then triple the 1985 goal in 1986.

Of the sought-for \$22.8 million in 1986, \$3,989,179 will go to the basic, on-going Mary Hill Davis Offering budget items, and all receipts over that amount--an expected \$18.8 million--will be designated for the new mission-church assistance fund.

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**(BP)**

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NEWS SERVICE OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION