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Review Board To Oversee
Christian Index, Editor

By Dan Martin and Michael Tutterow

ATLANTA (BP)--A five-member review board to oversee the "editorial policies, practices and personnel" of the Christian Index, the newsjournal of the Georgia Baptist Convention, has been named by the Index board of directors.

The action was announced Aug. 26, after a special called meeting of the 10-member Index board and followed four months of closed-door investigation by a special study committee into charges levelled against the Index, the oldest state Baptist newspaper in the Southern Baptist Convention, and its editor, Jack U. Harwell.

Harwell, 53, who has been associated with the Index since 1957 and its editor 20 years, has been under fire since 1979. That year, a joint GBC-Index committee affirmed Harwell's freedom to discuss issues deemed "to be of interest and concern to Georgia Baptists" but instructed him to be governed by the Baptist Faith and Message statement and to "reflect the spirit and theological position of Georgia and Southern Baptists."

The statement issued following the Aug. 26 meeting reaffirms the 1979 statement but asks "that the editor conform in both the letter and the spirit of this declaration."

While the 1979 study was launched after an effort had been made to fire Harwell at the annual meeting of the Georgia convention, the current controversy boiled over in May 1986 after Harwell wrote an editorial critical of the nominations of the SBC Committee on Boards, which was chaired by Lee Roberts, a Marietta businessman.

Roberts prepared and distributed a 32-page document to the study committee detailing complaints against Harwell, including an allegation Harwell had misrepresented circulation figures for the Index, and also questioned the editor's Christian ethics, fairness and effectiveness.

The businessman, a member of Eastside Baptist Church of Marietta, called for "replacement..." of Harwell, "not restrictions."

Christian Index Board Chairman George Barnett, pastor of Noonday Baptist Church of Marietta, in late May appointed a 7-member special committee "to make a serious study of the problems relating to the editorial policies, practice and personnel" of the Index.

Barnett said Roberts' charges, as well as other complaints, prompted the formation of the committee. "We decided to seriously evaluate the material," he said.

The chairman refused to link the Index controversy to the larger SBC battle but noted the bulk of negative mail against Harwell and the Index originated among fundamental-conservatives.

Although no one involved revealed specific charges against Harwell, the Atlanta Constitution reported Aug. 25 there were six primary issues: "That circulation failed during Harwell's editorship; that Harwell has served as a director of a potentially competing newspaper, SBC Today, an independent, Decatur-based journal that favors the moderates; that he has lost his objectivity and sides frequently with moderates; that he labels people unfairly in his editorials, making too free use of terms like fundamentalist and 'militant;' that he is not accountable to anyone; and that he has been too aggressive in helping seminary graduates find churches to pastor in Georgia."

The study committee was made up of four members of the Index board and three members of the GBC executive committee. Executive Director-Treasurer James N. Griffith was an ex-officio member. It was named during an executive session, the first such closed-door meeting of the Index board in more than 30 years. The committee conducted five closed-door meetings during the summer and reported back to the board in another executive session Aug. 26.

In addition to Barnett and Griffith, members of the study committee were Index vice chairman Charles Carter, pastor of First Baptist Church, Jonesboro; and directors Stanley R. Hendricks, pastor of First Baptist Church, Colquitt, and Clark Hutchinson, pastor of Eastside Baptist Church, Marietta.; Woodrow Hudson, pastor of First Baptist Church, Douglasville, member of the GBC executive committee; Billy Nimmons, pastor of First Baptist Church, Dalton, chairman of the executive committee; and Gene Tyre, pastor of First Baptist Church of Newnan, chairman of the administration committee.

Harwell met with the study committee once and was excluded from other meetings, including the two Index board executive sessions. On Aug. 26, the board met three hours behind closed doors before summoning Harwell for a two hour session.

Following the session with Harwell, the editor and the chairman met news media representatives and announced the formation of the review board and issued a three-point statement about the action.

The statement encouraged "the editor and staff of the Christian Index to affirm and follow the statements of the SBC Peace Committee as approved at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in June 1986." The Peace Committee statement deplored the use of "intemperate, inflammatory and unguarded language," called for fairness and accuracy in reporting and asked journalists "to refrain from labelling and attributing improper motives."

The statement also reaffirmed the 1979 statement which specifies the Index "is not a partisan or political journal.... Its purpose is to provide information and light and to cultivate unity of spirit and cooperation among the Baptists of Georgia...."

The August statement said the review board will "review each issue of the Christian Index and will meet at the call of the Index chairman and on the day preceeding each regularly scheduled Index board meeting."

Members of the review board will be the chairmen of the GBC executive Committee, its administration committee and the Index chairman, vice chairman and secretary. Harwell, who has been secretary of the Index board, will be replaced and a "member of the board will be elected to this position," the statement says.

Currently, the review board will be Barnett, Carter, Nimmons, Tyre and a secretary to be elected later. Membership, however, is expected to change following the November meeting of the state convention.

The action said "if the editor...does not comply with these recommendations and the counsel of the review board, he will then be encouraged, by Index board action, to seek other employment."

Under the Georgia convention structure, neither the review board nor the Index board has power to fire Harwell. The Index board, however, could make a recommendation to the executive committee, which does employ the editor and appoints the Index board, should Harwell receive unfavorable reviews.

Barnett said the "review board is for both critique and affirmation," and said the "intention is not to censor or to muzzle." He added he would have opposed a recommendation which would have stilled "the prophetic voice of the editor."

Harwell said he is satisfied with the board decision: "It was a sensible, workable and realistic solution to a difficult problem. I will not feel any more restrictions than the normal constraints of Christian courtesy."

He added, however, that if the board "had said they would have screened editorials before the fact, they would have had my resignation."

Roberts said he thinks the action "is a step in the right direction" but added he believes it is a "dark and bitter day for Georgia Baptists when we have an editor who is so mistrusted that we have to have five men to oversee what he does.... It is difficult to see why Jack Harwell would want to be the editor under these circumstances and even more difficult to understand how he could remain the editor in the light of absolute and undeniable proof of his misdeeds and ineffectiveness," Roberts said.

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RIVC Restructures Debt;
Obtains \$10 Million Loan

By Dan Martin

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FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)—A \$10 million loan to restructure debt incurred with the start and operation of the American Christian Television System has been obtained by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission.

The loan, which will allow the commission to refinance \$8,516,000 in short-term loans and general obligation notes, also will provide slightly more than \$1 million for operation of the two-year-old network.

The loan, granted by the Central Bank of Walnut Creek, Calif., was signed Aug. 22, and the commission began drawing on the proceeds almost immediately in order to consolidate outstanding indebtedness by paying four bank notes totaling \$5,292,000. In October, the commission will begin paying \$3,244,000 in general obligation notes.

Fred Roach, a Dallas homebuilder and chairman of the commission finance committee, said: "This loan will give us breathing room. The (debt) restructuring process puts the financial affairs of the RIVC in a more ordered way."

According to Jimmy R. Allen, president of the commission, the loan "drops the monthly debt service pressure. We will be paying about \$128,000 per month on this loan and that will be about \$200,000 per month less pressure on us."

Currently, the commission pays more than \$325,000 per month on its debt and faces large lump sum payments when the general obligation notes come due.

In September of 1985, the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention granted permission for the commission to seek the long-term loan as well as to conduct a \$10 million fund-raising campaign to fund the payments.

The Business and Financial Plan of the Southern Baptist Convention limits the borrowing authority of SBC agencies to amounts which can be repaid out of "anticipated receipts for current operations within a period of three years." Exceptions require approval either by the annual meeting or the Executive Committee, as do special solicitations "for budget needs, endowment, building, equipment or other purposes...."

Following meetings in February and September of 1985, the Executive Committee approved an exception to the Business and Financial Plan by permitting the commission to restructure its debt by seeking a \$10 million loan with a 10-year payback and starting a special solicitation campaign to attempt to raise \$10 million.

The Central Bank loan was approved by commission trustees during a special called meeting Aug. 12 and by the Special RIVC Study Committee of the Executive Committee Aug. 21.

Harmon Born, an Atlanta automobile dealer and chairman of the special study committee, told Baptist Press the role of the committee was not to approve the loan since that is a function of commission trustees, but merely to see that it "meets the terms of the action (of the Executive Committee) which approved it."

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Harold C. Bennett, president of the Executive Committee, said the action of the special study committee does not obligate the SBC or its Executive Committee to pay the loan in the event of default by the commission.

Under terms of the loan, the commission will pay the 1 percent above the bank's prime interest rate, which at the time of closing was 8 percent. The payments will be made for 84 months (seven years) at which time a "balloon" note of about \$3.5 million will be due. Also included are loan costs of \$175,000, of which one point—\$100,000—is an origination fee and the remaining \$75,000 is attorney's fees and title insurance.

James Edwards, chief financial officer of the commission, said many banks currently finance large amounts for five years. The terms of the California loan are "very favorable," he added.

According to loan summary information, the commission pledged \$14,197,166 as collateral, including about \$8.5 million in real property in Fort Worth, \$3.1 million in equipment and \$2.3 in programming inventory.

Of the \$1.3 million of the loan left after the debts are paid and loan costs are met, commission trustees will consider placing \$135,000 in its general contingency reserve fund, bringing that fund to \$300,000, and adding \$50,000 per year for four years to bring the fund to \$500,000.

Of the remaining funds, Allen said about \$1 million will go toward new production and acquired programs to be shown on the network, which currently is available to about 3.9 million households in the United States through cable television systems and an estimated 800,000 homes through two full-power and four low-power stations.

Roach said the \$1 million "is a limited amount, but it will give us some impetus...." Allen said it will be "a shot in the arm...a major new energy for refreshing the network."

Allen said the funds will provide for new production on Country Crossroads, a country music-gospel show; Life Today, a talk show; and new episodes of In Concert, Plant Groom, Primetimers, Invitation to Life and Cope. "We are also negotiating for some situation comedies, some ethnic situation dramas and children's programming," he said.

Both Allen and Roach said the number of households with access to ACTS has not grown as fast as anticipated and Allen said the 3.9 million cable households "is hitting our most conservative level of anticipated growth." Allen, however, said projections indicate the network will be reaching 12 million households by September of 1988, the minimum number necessary for significant advertising revenues.

Two other avenues by which to raise money for the network—capital campaigns and sale of ACTS programs to other broadcasters—also have not produced the dollars anticipated. Both Roach and Allen, however, emphasized the fund-raising campaigns and the effort to syndicate the five programs is being studied and will be modified.

"We have been learning as we go," Allen said. "We have been reaching our development goals, but the costs have been very high. We are reshaping our efforts. In syndication, we started something experimental, and we are not satisfied that we have done all that we can do."

Allen said trustees, when they meet Sept. 8-9 in Fort Worth, for their regular fall meeting, will be asked to look at both the development campaigns and at the effort to sell ACTS products.

According to figures provided by the commission, the development efforts across the past year have produced \$1.9 million in pledges and actual revenues of \$922,000, including a single gift of \$400,000. The cost of the development activities has been \$1,219,000, giving the development effort a current deficit of \$297,000. Allen, however, explained only two of the capital campaigns—in Mobile, Ala., and Baton Rouge, La.—have been completed. Two others—in Birmingham, Ala., and Atlanta—are still in process and are expected to produce better results.

Allen said: "I had hoped to raise between \$2 million and \$3 million; and we have done nearly that, but it has cost us too much to raise it. We have been in the process of learning how to conduct capital campaigns, but the cost has been unacceptably high so far."

Roach explained that in all development activities "you invest money to create funds, but we have been having to invest too much money for too few funds. We are going to have to reallocate our funds to efforts which are more consistent with our kind of operation. We are not a university and so do not have alumni to draw on. We are going to have to do more rifle shooting in our development efforts rather than take the shotgun approach."

Allen said a new strategy of development is being worked out and indicated it will be presented to trustees at the September meeting.

Of syndication, financial statements indicate success of the effort to sell five programs has been less than expected. Sales have amounted to \$73,000, well below the projection of \$216,000.

Allen said the syndication efforts had been based on what had been produced for use on the network, and a major market study currently is being done for presentation at the trustee meeting about the future directions of the efforts to sell the programs.

"We will be proposing a new style of Country Crossroads, one more in tune with current marketing. We also are acquiring the rights to about 200 movies, which we believe are syndicable. Now we are syndicating Country Crossroads, Sunshine Factory, Cope, Plant Groom and the David Wade Show," he said.

Allen said commission employees are conducting the study to determine how saleable the shows are, both at home and abroad. The study is being done with the assistance of a syndication consultant from New York, he added.

"We will be making some policy decisions about development and about syndication when our trustees meet," Allen said.

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Robert Dilday Joins
Virginia Newspaper

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)—Robert H. Dilday has been named associate editor of the Religious Herald, newsjournal of the Baptist General Association of Virginia, effective Sept. 15.

He will be associated with Editor Julian H. Pentecost in all phases of the newspaper's operation, with primary responsibility in production, Pentecost said.

Dilday has been associate editor of the Christian Index, newsjournal for Georgia Baptists, since August of 1984. He also has been a newswriter for the Arkansas Baptist Newsmagazine, newsjournal for Baptists in that state.

He has been assistant to the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs in Washington and an intern with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission.

Dilday is a graduate of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. He has done additional studies in journalism at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of Texas at Arlington.

He and his wife, the former Nancie Wingo, have a son, Harrison, who was born this summer.

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