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Baptist Joint Committee Asks
Court To Review Vatican Case

By Stan Haste

BSC-N

WASHINGTON (BP)—Calling President Reagan's appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican a "blatant violation" of the First Amendment's demand of government impartiality toward various faiths, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs has asked the Supreme Court to review lower decisions upholding the action.

In a friend-of-the-court brief written by its general counsel, Oliver S. Thomas, the Baptist Joint Committee argued the high court should review the case because Reagan's action more than two years ago conferred upon the Roman Catholic Church a status not enjoyed by any other religious group.

"Perhaps the most fundamental guarantee of the establishment clause of the First Amendment is that government cannot act in a way that prefers one religion over another," Thomas wrote.

Reagan announced the appointment of long-time political adviser William A. Wilson as ambassador to the Holy See in January 1984, ending a 117-year period during which the United States was forbidden by Congress to establish formal diplomatic ties with the Vatican. An action by the U.S. Senate in November 1983 cleared the way for re-establishing such ties by repealing the 1867 ban.

Wilson resigned his post earlier this year, leaving a vacancy Reagan has yet to fill. Although numerous religious bodies have urged the president to leave the position vacant, he is expected to fill it.

Dozens of religious bodies and individual taxpayers challenged the Wilson appointment in a suit filed by Americans United for Separation of Church and State in the U.S. District Court for Eastern Pennsylvania. That panel ruled in May 1985, however, plaintiffs had no legal standing to bring the suit. Even had standing been granted, the ruling continued, plaintiffs would have lost anyway because the Constitution confers on the president the authority to conduct foreign policy, including the appointment of ambassadors.

Last March, a three-judge panel of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia affirmed the lower ruling. In making a final appeal to the nation's high court, the plaintiffs agreed their chances would be better if Americans United were not the lead petitioner. Accordingly, the case was re-fashioned as American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. v. Reagan.

In the Baptist Joint Committee brief, Thomas asked the court to reaffirm the longstanding legal principle that even in conducting foreign policy, "the president's power is not unlimited. He does not have the power to violate the First Amendment by appointing an ambassador to a church.... In short, it is the responsibility of the court to see that the Constitution is upheld and that even the president abides by its commands."

On the question of standing, Thomas argued the parties petitioning the court's review of the lower decisions have suffered actual injuries, a basic criterion for establishing legal standing. As a direct result of Reagan's action, he went on: "The petitioning churches and religious organizations have been made objects of official governmental discrimination. They, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, will not have the benefit of diplomatic access to the president of the United States of America."

He continued: "By creating formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See, the United States government necessarily communicates that the Roman Catholic Church is to be preferred and that all other religious organizations somehow are inferior. This preferential treatment of one church and the implicit discrimination against all others is perhaps the most obvious form of injury that could be suffered by a religious organization.

"It is shocking to imagine that the individuals and organizations who are the objects of this overt act of governmental discrimination do not have standing to challenge this illegal exercise of power."

The Reagan administration has insisted it established diplomatic relations with the Vatican state, not with the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican, located in the heart of Rome on a 108-acre tract of land presided over by Roman Catholic popes since 1870 and the dissolution of the medieval papal states, maintains diplomatic relations with most modern nations.

But the administration position has been disputed by Archbishop Pio Laghi, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio--or ambassador--to the United States. Speaking at the Catholic University of America in April 1984, Laghi asserted all nations having diplomatic ties with the Vatican are tied to the church, not to a nation-state. Referring to what he called "confusion and controversy that arose in the media" at the time U.S.-Vatican relations were formalized, Laghi went on to say, "Some mistakenly tried to justify the American government's action by implying that it was entering into a diplomatic relationship not with the Roman Catholic Church as such, the Holy See, but rather with the sovereign Vatican City-State."

In his brief asking for the high court review of the dispute, Thomas wrote, "The Holy See's own characterization of itself should not be set aside merely because the president thinks otherwise. Allowing the president to define conclusively the nature of the Holy See in contradiction of its own statements...goes beyond the constitutional separation of powers and confers upon the president unfettered authority that is not intended by the Constitution."

The formal petition asking the high court to review the lower rulings is to be considered sometime after the court reconvenes Oct. 1. Four of the nine justices must vote to hear the case before it can be placed on the schedule for oral arguments.

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Africa Now Threatened
By Swarms Of Locusts

By David Wilkinson

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WASHINGTON (BP)—Swarms of locusts are devouring the crops of at least six African nations, threatening to wipe out already fragile food supplies and plunge the continent back into a severe hunger crisis.

In a cruel twist of irony, the potentially devastating locust plague has been spawned by the desperately needed rains which fell earlier this year.

Two of the countries seriously threatened by the locust plague are Ethiopia and Mali, where foreign missionaries in recent years have utilized millions of hunger relief dollars contributed by Southern Baptists.

Also, locusts already have damaged as much as 60 percent of Chad's crops and have severely harmed crops in Botswana and central Sudan, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization reported.

While the rains brought relief to the worst drought in decades, they also produced fertile breeding grounds for insects. According to the United States Agency for International Development, eggs of four major types of locusts and one species of grasshopper have begun to hatch simultaneously around the continent, creating the potential for the worst locust infestation in Africa in the last 60 years.

Once hatched, the swarms of locusts are blown about by winds, often for hundreds of miles, and can descend on crop land with virtually no warning. A swarm, which may consist of billions of insects, can eat 80,000 metric tons of cereal crops in a single day.

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Officials at the Food and Agriculture Organization estimate a single swarm can consume in one day what 40,000 people eat in one year.

The U.S. State Department has provided an additional \$5 million for chemicals to fight the insects, and other countries also have donated aid.

Relief officials say, however, more aid is needed to help purchase pesticides and equipment for massive pest control operations.

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Texas Lawmakers
Bet On Gambling

By Ken Camp

TEX-N

Baptist Press
8/29/86

DALLAS (BP)—The Texas Christian Life Commission and other gambling opponents appear to have been dealt a losing hand in the special session of the Texas Legislature, but they insist the final word on legalized gambling in Texas has not yet been spoken.

By a 19-10 vote Aug. 25, the Senate tentatively approved a bill that would call for a statewide referendum Nov. 4 allowing voters to accept or reject legalized pari-mutuel gambling. The next day, the Senate gave final approval to the bill by a 17-12 vote and sent it on to the House of Representatives.

A major House committee gave the measure its endorsement immediately, and the bill passed the House 78-69 Aug. 28. However, that narrow margin of victory left the bill far short of the 100 votes needed to add a referendum on pari-mutuel betting to the Nov. 4 ballot.

The earliest the question could be submitted to Texas voters appears to be Nov. 3, 1987. The measure still must be approved by the House one more time and then be returned to the Senate for consideration of amendments added by the House. If approved there, it will go to Gov. Mark White for his signature.

Although the bill would require a statewide referendum, gambling proponents admit it could still come into effect if courts ruled the referendum illegal. Some maintain the referendum is an unconstitutional intrusion on the Legislature's authority to make laws in Texas.

White repeatedly has maintained he will not sign any pari-mutuel gambling bill unless it includes a statewide referendum, local option elections and strong safeguards against organized crime.

In the Senate, some questions also were raised as to the propriety of the measure due to contradictory rulings by Lt. Gov. William Hobby about whether or not the gambling bill was a revenue measure.

Early in Senate debate on the bill, Hobby had ruled the pari-mutuel bill was a revenue-raising measure and therefore could be broadly interpreted as being included in White's agenda for the special session. Later, he ruled the bill only incidentally raises money for the state; therefore, it could originate in the Senate rather than the House. A court challenge is possible.

The special session was called by White primarily to consider a temporary sales tax increase to help bridge the state's anticipated \$3.5 billion deficit.

The pari-mutuel legislation, sponsored by Sen. O.H. "Ike" Harris of Dallas, would open the door to betting on horseracing throughout the state and on greyhound races in three Gulf Coast counties. If gambling wins on the general ballot, counties wanting pari-mutuel would then have to gain voter approval on a local-option basis.

During debate Aug. 25, senators rejected more than a dozen amendments to the gambling bill, including two provisions by Sen. Craig Washington that would have designated the state's share of track receipts for Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

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Approval was granted by the Senate in spite of arguments by Sen. John Leedom of Dallas that pari-mutuel gambling would prey on the poor and present a "pie in the sky" get-rich-quick dream to desperate people.

Although gambling proponents claimed pari-mutuel gambling could raise \$3.6 million in the coming fiscal year, even they acknowledged it would not solve all of the state's immediate economic problems.

The Senate State Affairs Committee also gave its endorsement to a proposed constitutional amendment that would establish a state lottery. If approved by the legislature, the amendment could appear on the November ballot. By a series of 20-9 votes Aug. 28, the Senate tentatively adopted the proposed constitutional amendment as well as a companion bill setting up the state-run lottery if approved by voters.

Although one vote short of the two-thirds needed to place the issue on the Nov. 4 ballot, supporters of the lottery still hope to gain that vote on a third reading and to give the lottery final approval.

Discussion of the proposed state lottery was scheduled as part of the 9 a.m. Senate State Affairs Committee hearing Aug. 25, but the subject was placed last on the agenda. Because the Senate was scheduled to convene at 11:30 a.m., only one lottery proponent and one opponent were allowed to testify during the morning hearings. Others testified when the committee reconvened after the Senate debate on pari-mutuel betting.

At the beginning of the hearing, Sen. Roy Blake of Nacogdoches raised a point of order, claiming consideration of a lottery was not part of White's call for the special session. He was overruled by the presiding chair of the panel.

Persons testifying in support of a lottery included the director of the Missouri lottery, a lottery industry consultant from Pennsylvania and a representative from the Texas Retail Grocers Association. Spokesmen for religious and anti-crime organizations testified in opposition to the lottery.

Larry Braidfoot, general counsel for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, submitted testimony stating the proposed state-sponsored lottery is a regressive tax that would draw its business disproportionately from minorities, stimulate illegal gambling and contribute to the problem of compulsive gamblers.

Responding to protests by the lottery bill's sponsor, Sen. Hector Uribe of Brownsville, that lottery opponents offered alleged facts with no documentation, Braidfoot submitted a 19-page footnoted testimony documenting each of his claims.

The testimony claimed the state's role in "being the huckster that promotes the very activity which is detrimental to the health of the individual" is in direct opposition to government's constitutional obligation to promote the general welfare.

Braidfoot submitted his testimony at the request of the Anti-Crime Council of Texas, an organization of law enforcement officials, businessmen, community leaders and churchmen working to defeat legalized gambling.

Sue Cox, director of the council, also testified. She questioned where provisions were in the proposed amendment to guard against crime, corruption and fraud.

"This is bad legislation promoting a bad product," she said.

Weston Ware, associate director of the Texas Christian Life Commission, said a state-sponsored lottery makes the state government "the big bookie."

"It is bad public policy for the state to have a vested interest in making losers out of its citizens," said Ware. "Even with willing victims, I don't believe the state belongs in a swindling business."

Any Church Can Grow,
Alabama Pastor Says

By Linda Lawson

BSSB-F

GLORIETA, N.M. (BP)—Any church can grow—including one in an area of zero population growth in a "very rural section of Alabama, even past the sticks," said Jack Still, pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Welti, Ala.

He reiterated his message of optimism that each of the 22,000 small churches in the Southern Baptist Convention can grow during sessions of the Small Sunday School Leadership Conference at Glorieta (N.M.) Baptist Conference Center.

"You don't have to be a large church to grow. You don't have to have a multiple staff to grow. Any small church can grow," said Still.

His conviction is based on personal experience. In nine years at Mount Zion, located six miles out from Cullman, Ala., the church has increased its Sunday school enrollment from 98 to 420 and its average attendance from 65 to 180.

The growth began with commitment and a belief that it was possible to reach out to people and enroll them in Sunday school.

"Most churches haven't grown for so long they don't have a mindset or attitude for growth," said Still. He noted two-thirds of the 14 million members of Southern Baptist churches have never been part of a growing church.

Churches in areas where the population is not increasing allow that reality mentally to defeat their efforts before they ever go out and knock on doors, said Still. "There are always more people out there than we're reaching. For every three homes in a community, the people in two of them are not enrolled in anybody's Sunday school," he added.

He cited three keys to growth which he said will work for any church—locate prospects, enroll prospects in Sunday school and start new classes.

"If attendance is going to grow, enrollment has got to grow. If enrollment grows, you've got to have a prospect file equal to your Sunday school enrollment. For every two persons you enroll in Sunday school, one will attend," said Still.

Despite the average Baptist's fear of asking someone to enroll in Sunday school, 52 percent of those asked will agree to be enrolled, Still said. He noted in his community one man had lived in the area for six years before anyone from the church invited him to attend.

Still, who was a bivocational pastor working as a machinist in a Birmingham, Ala., steel mill until 1980, has led his church to start 20 new Sunday school classes to accommodate the growth. Included was a boys' class that met in a six- by eight-foot broom closet until more classrooms could be built.

Growth will bring problems such as lack of space, Still acknowledged. However, he is quick to add people are more willing to work together to solve the problems. In his church, members did their own construction work, completing additions debt-free.

"We gave together. We built together. We saw the church grow together," he said.

The small churches in the Southern Baptist Convention could, by themselves, account for a Sunday school enrollment gain of more than 1.5 million persons by 1990 if every church would start one new adult class each year, Still said.

About 100,000 new classes would bring in at least 1 million adults, Still calculated, and the children these persons would bring would account for another 500,000.

He encouraged pastors "not to worry about going to a bigger church but to stay where they are and grow the one they have. Wherever they are, they can grow the Sunday school and grow the church."