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WASHINGTON -- CLC, NAE seek to form coalition on Vatican ties.

SALT LAKE CITY -- Southern Baptists struggle to gain ground in Mormon stronghold, photo.

SALT LAKE CITY -- Utah Baptists urge messengers to be properly trained.

ATLANTA -- HMB accepting youth missions applications.

CLC, NAE seek to form  
coalition on Vatican ties

By Tom Strode

Baptist Press  
12/31/92

WASHINGTON (BP)--The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission and the National Association of Evangelicals are attempting to reestablish a coalition with the hope of convincing President-elect Bill Clinton to end the United States' diplomatic relationship with the Vatican.

Richard Land, the CLC's executive director, and Robert Dugan, director of NAE's office of public affairs, sent a Dec. 23 letter to officials with 11 organizations asking them to join together to call for Clinton to refuse to appoint an ambassador to the Vatican because it is a violation of the separation of church and state.

In the letter, they describe this effort as possibly a "final opportunity to reverse a policy that cannot be reconciled with the spirit or letter of the Constitution. If the same Protestant coalition which opposed President Reagan's appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican in 1984 can be resurrected, we believe that the President-elect can be convinced to rescind the policy."

Land and Dugan say they are optimistic for two reasons.

"First, the policy is only eight years old," the letter says. "Second, as a Southern Baptist, President-elect Clinton has a better understanding of proper church-state separation, at least as it pertains to this policy, than did Presidents Reagan and Bush."

While the organizations may not agree on other religious liberty issues, Land and Dugan say, "we all agree that the practice of appointing an ambassador to the Vatican is a clear violation of the First Amendment and is bad public policy."

The letter was sent to James Dunn, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, as well as officials with the American Baptist Churches, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Church of the Brethren, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention, USA, National Council of Churches, Presbyterian Church (USA), Progressive National Baptist Convention, Seventh-day Adventist Church and Unitarian Universalist Association.

The proposed coalition letter the officials are asked to endorse requests Clinton to take a stand similar to that of former President John Kennedy, who said during the 1960 campaign appointing an ambassador to the Vatican would be unconstitutional.

The proposed letter also says, "(Kennedy) further said: 'I am flatly opposed to the appointment of a United States ambassador to the Vatican because it will not be of any benefit to either party.' We concur with our first Roman Catholic president."

In a Dec. 2 letter, the CLC's Land asked Clinton to reverse a "wrong done" by President Reagan. Since then, the NAE's Dugan and Barry Lynn, new executive director of Americans United, also have written Clinton asking him to sever diplomatic ties with the Vatican.

In both Land's letter and the proposed coalition letter, the Vatican is described as, in actuality, an "ecclesiastical entity," not a civil state.

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Southern Baptists stood in the forefront in opposing Reagan's appointment and the Senate's confirmation of William Wilson as the first U.S. ambassador to the Vatican in 1984. Resolutions of opposition were passed by the SBC Executive Committee, the Foreign Mission Board and agency heads. Jimmy Draper, then SBC president, wrote Reagan a letter opposing the policy.

The Baptist Joint Committee was among the leaders of the opposition in 1984. The SBC, which was one of the member organizations of the BJC then, severed its official ties to the BJC in 1992. The Christian Life Commission received a religious liberty assignment from the convention in 1990.

The SBC approved resolutions opposing diplomatic ties with the Vatican at its annual meetings in 1939, 1940, 1942, 1969, 1984 and 1986.

Religious and religious liberty organizations were involved in a suit challenging Reagan's appointment in 1984. A federal court of appeals ruled in May 1985 those bringing the suit did not have legal standing.

The officials receiving the letter from Land and Dugan were asked to provide a response by Jan. 6.

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Southern Baptists struggle to gain  
ground in Mormon stronghold

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
12/31/92

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--Contender for the 2002 winter Olympics. First on Fortune magazine's 1990 list of best cities for business. Centerpiece in an outdoor playground of ski resorts and national parks.

For all it offers, Salt Lake City is foreign to most Southern Baptists who think of it only as the worldwide headquarters for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormons.

Corporations are attracted to Utah for the labor pool which the New York Times described as "young, well-educated, non-union and reared with the hard work ethos of the pervasive Mormon faith."

Calling Mormonism pervasive is an understatement. Seventy-one percent of Utah's residents are Mormons, and less than 1 percent are Southern Baptists, according to a 1990 survey of church membership.

"Mormonism is more than a religion. It's a culture, a way of life," said Lavid Robertson, home missionary and recently retired director of evangelism for the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

In Utah, being Mormon is a prerequisite for social and political success. "Either play their game or you're out," Robertson said.

Yet Robertson said God has given him a love for Mormons. "They are good people," he said. "They are deceived, but they don't know it."

When Robertson moved from Texas to Idaho 31 years ago, a neighbor called immediately to say he was a Mormon elder with a wonderful message to share. Robertson replied that he was a Baptist preacher who also had a wonderful message to share. The neighbor hung up and never befriended Robertson.

Mormons have changed their tactics in a search for acceptance by mainstream religions, Robertson said. Now the church would expect Robertson's neighbor to offer his friendship rather than alienate him, he said.

Exclusion felt by non-Mormons may be most difficult for teenagers who have a strong desire to belong to a group, said Eric Frye, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church of Salt Lake City for 15 years.

Frye's younger son, now in his 20s, lives in another state. He was popular in high school and was active in athletic programs, but he tells his parents now that if they did not live in Salt Lake City, he would never come back to the place where he felt so left out.

Mormonism teaches that men are potential gods, and that women can be married to gods. "Youth who believe they are going to be gods or married to a god can be condescending," Frye said. "If you aren't part of that, you are by nature considered inferior."

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In some cases, Mormon children are not allowed to attend Baptist-sponsored activities, said home missionary Steve Scudder, director of Salt Lake City's Baptist Concern Center and pastor of Glendale Baptist Church.

One of the concern center's roles is to distribute food and infant supplies to needy families. The Mormon church has an extensive social service network, but Scudder said the material is used as bribes. Needy Mormons who have not attended church faithfully are told that they will receive assistance if they resume their church attendance.

Some people leave the Mormon church because of the bishops' power to control who receives assistance and who is worthy to be admitted to the temple, Scudder said. Those who leave Mormonism typically reject all religions rather than seeking another faith, he said.

On the other hand, Sandra Tanner, co-director of Utah Lighthouse Ministry, said she left Mormonism because she thought, "There's got to be more of God than I'm finding in Mormonism, and I was weary of trying to be good enough for eternal life."

Yet Tanner hesitated to leave the Mormon church because she wondered how her family would react, if she would lose her job and if the neighbors' children would play with her children.

Leaving Mormonism is difficult, Tanner said, because it is an ethnic identity. "I spent my first year as a Christian crying," because of the ties she was breaking with her family and culture.

For Scudder, being a non-Mormon in Utah is actually an opportunity to witness. He is often asked "Where are you from?" and "Why are you here?" Answering those questions opens door for him to witness, Scudder said. In two years, he has seen 10 people make professions of faith, and he has baptized seven people.

Tony Harrell, bivocational pastor of Roosevelt Baptist Church in Salt Lake City, has adopted a motto from Mormonism: "Every member a missionary." He trains his church members to share the plan of salvation and give a testimony of what God has done in their lives. His church baptized 30 people in 1991.

Mike Gray, pastor of Southeast Baptist Church in Salt Lake City for almost nine years, emphasizes, "We're not fighting Mormonism; we're preaching Jesus Christ."

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(BP) photo mailed to Baptist state newspapers by Atlanta bureau of Baptist Press. Additional stories and photos from Salt Lake City sent to Baptist papers in Arkansas, Ohio, Texas, and Utah/Idaho.

Utah Baptists urge messengers  
to be properly trained

By Sarah Zimmerman

Baptist Press  
12/31/92

SALT LAKE CITY (BP)--Although the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting isn't scheduled for Salt Lake City until 1998, Southern Baptists there are already looking forward to it.

Meeting in Salt Lake City "will help us and it will help Southern Baptists, if the messengers are properly trained," said Lavid Robertson, recently retired director of evangelism for the Utah-Idaho Southern Baptist Convention.

Robertson has at least three suggestions for people who want to witness to Mormons.

-- "Know who you are as Christians and know what you believe. Reaffirm your Christian commitment, because it will be challenged."

-- Distinguish between Mormons and Mormonism. Love the people without embracing their religion.

-- Learn who God is and who Christ is. Mormons teach that "As man is, God once was, and as God is, man can become," Robertson said.

Several resources for learning about Mormonism are offered through the Home Mission Board's interfaith witness department. A free belief bulletin which highlights basic Mormon doctrines and biblical responses is available by calling HMB customer services at 1-800-634-2462 and requesting item 363-58F.

A two-part video which examines the history of the Mormon church and its teachings is available for \$9.50. It can also be ordered through the toll-free customer service number.

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Interfaith witness associates are Southern Baptists trained to lead workshops on various world religions. To find an associate who specializes in Mormonism, contact the interfaith witness coordinator in your state convention office.

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HMB accepting youth  
missions applications      By David Winfrey

Baptist Press  
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ATLANTA (BP)--High school juniors and seniors seeking to be Sojourner summer missionaries through the Home Mission Board should apply by March 10.

The Home Mission Board is also accepting applications for mission youth groups for summer work in various types of ministry, including inner-city missions, resort projects and newer convention areas, said Valerie Hardy, associate director of the HMB's short-term volunteer department.

Throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, about 31,600 students were involved in mission youth group activities in 1992, an increase compared to 30,500 in 1991.

The Sojourner program also had an increase in 1992, with 130 volunteers compared to 108 in 1991.

Sojourners are high school students who have completed their junior or senior year and are willing to work six to 10 weeks during the summer. They receive food, lodging and local transportation while on assignment. Sojourners are responsible for their transportation to and from the site, but assistance is available in some cases. The need for mission youth groups remains high, Hardy said. Last year, the department filled only 69 percent of the requests from missionaries and churches seeking students to help with Backyard Bible Clubs, sports clinics, music concerts and other ministry projects.

Churches planning to assemble a mission youth group should contact the Home Mission Board's short-term volunteer department by mid-March, said Hardy. Groups must be able to provide their own food, lodging and transportation, she said.

Anyone wanting more information about Sojourners or mission youth groups can contact the Home Mission Board at 1-800-HMB-VOLS.

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