

BAPTIST FEATURES

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Editor's Note: Baptist World Alliance Sunday falls Feb. 3. This second Baptist Press personality feature on Southern Baptist Convention leaders portrays Josef Nordenhaug, the alliance general secretary.

Nordenhaug Labors
Show Craftmanship

By C. E. Bryant
For Baptist Press

Josef Nordenhaug painstakingly--almost lovingly--removed the lumber from the trunk compartment of his car. "It is wild cherry," he explained to a curious neighbor, "and it has aged 28 years. I plan to make a chest of drawers and a grandmother's clock out of it."

He learned the art of fine craftsmanship in his father's cabinet shop at Oslo, Norway, and he maintains a shop of his own in the basement of his home at Arlington, Va., a Washington suburb. "Woodwork is to me what golf is to others," he says.

The lumber he brought back to Washington from Kentucky was some he had purchased during his pastorate of the Irene Cole Baptist Church at Prestonburg, 1933-36. He patiently stored it there until it was sufficiently aged to do the job he had in mind.

Other evidences of Nordenhaug's building skills and long-range planning are scattered around the world.

The octagonal chapel on a hilltop at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon-Zurich, Switzerland, incorporates his architectural ideas of what a Baptist chapel should be. The new Baptist church on a strategic intersection in Douala, Cameroun, and the eye-catching church at Antony, outside Paris, France, were constructed from his plans. Right now, he is "doodling" diagrams for a new Baptist building in Washington.

Nordenhaug, a man of medium stature, is 59 and grey. His smile conveys an attitude of cordiality and personal sincerity.

Professionally or vocationally, he is generally known as a theologian. He served 10 years, 1950-60, as president of the International Baptist Theological Seminary at Ruschlikon. He has been pastor of five churches for a total of 19 years. He also is known and respected as a writer and editor, having once been editor of The Commission, publication of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

His position today is that of general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance.

"He is one of the most versatile men I have ever known," Theodore F. Adams, Richmond, past president of the Baptist World Alliance, said of him. "His mind is a gold mine of information on almost any subject. I find it a thrill to be in discussions with him."

Visitors to Nordenhaug's office in Washington note that his desk is clear of all papers except those pertaining to his project of the moment. And they marvel at his ability to pull from a desk file, as if by magic, the pertinent data on almost any subject they introduce.

"Stay on top of your job," he told an associate who was facing frustration on a particular chore. "Never let your job get on top of you." And another time, an associate seeking Nordenhaug's decision on a matter, heard his considerate superior say, "This is a matter in your own area of responsibility. We will abide by your judgment on it." The coworker immediately took on a great sense of appreciation for the importance of his own job.

The Norwegian's philosophy of life is linked to an unwavering faith in a great God. He has little patience with people who look to God as a "stop-gap" when emergency situations develop. "God was here before the emergency and he will be here after the emergency," he declares.

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"We need to reach up to a more adequate conception of the majesty and might of God," he says. "We need a fuller commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ--to be a follower rather than just an admirer.

"And among all Christian people we need a flood of love, a love that will dispel fear, melt prejudice, and cement fellowship."

He confessed a secret ambition to leading denominational scholars who gathered in his office last November for a planning conference of the Alliance's four study commissions. "I want to start a theological magazine in layman's language," he said. "It would do for theology what Popular Mechanics magazine has done for the untrained and inexperienced handyman."

Nordenhaug's work at the Alliance is truly worldwide in its scope. Through offices in Washington and London, the Alliance seeks to unite 24 million Baptists in more than 100 countries in a working fellowship for service and cooperation. This is accomplished through correspondence, travel to out-of-the-way spots around the globe, and great international meetings.

"The Baptist World Alliance hand of fellowship has five fingers," he sums up the organization's objectives. "It serves as an agency for communication, a forum for study and fraternal discussion, a channel of cooperation in extending aid to the suffering, a vigilant force for safeguarding religious liberty and other God-given rights, and a sponsor for regional and worldwide gatherings for the furtherance of the gospel."

Two worldwide meetings are scheduled for the immediate future. The Sixth Baptist Youth World Conference, largely directed by Associate Secretary Robert S. Denny, will meet at Beirut, Lebanon, July 15-21, 1963. The 11th Baptist World Congress will meet at Miami Beach, June 25-30, 1965.

Nordenhaug was educated in the Norwegian schools and studied chemistry, geophysics and astronomy at the University of Oslo. At the age of 25, after earning his university degrees in science, he felt a call to the ministry.

"How do you explain this switch in your interest from physical sciences to theology?" a radio commentator asked him on a return visit in Oslo. "It is simple," Nordenhaug replied. "I first learned the miracles of our universe, then I wanted to know about the craftsman who created them."

His theological interest brought him to the United States for study at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. He chose Southern Seminary because he had become acquainted with its president, E. Y. Mullins, when Mullins toured Europe as president of the Baptist World Alliance.

He won both the master of theology and doctor of philosophy degrees at Louisville, then returned to Norway in 1932 to be assistant pastor of the Baptist Church in Oslo.

The next year, 1933, he returned to Kentucky to be pastor of the Prestonburg church, and to marry a Louisville girl, Helen Bacon Rampp, in 1934.

He moved to Vinton, Va., as pastor in 1936, and to the Rivermont Baptist Church at Lynchburg in 1941. Editorship of The Commission and presidency of the seminary at Ruschlikon followed in rapid-fire order in 1948 and 1950.

Since moving to Washington in 1960, Nordenhaug has officiated at the weddings of both his children--Theodore, now working on his doctorate in philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, and Karen, who married a young French minister.

Cutlines

Baptist Press Photo

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(with feature story on Josef Nordenhaug enclosed)

WORLD FIGURE--Josef Nordenhaug guides the work of the Baptist World Alliance as its general secretary.