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March 9, 1970

Blessitt Reaches Half-way
Mark on Trek To Washington

by Bob Matthews

OKLAHOMA CITY (BP)--When Arthur Blessitt, young Southern Baptist minister of Sunset Strip," lifted the 30-pound, ten-foot cross from his shoulders here, he had reached the half-way mark in his 3,600 mile march to Washington, D.C., from California,

Blessitt and a quartet of young men are carrying the cross across the nation "to emphasize the need for spiritual awakening throughout America." Along the way, the group pauses for evangelistic rallies in major cities.

Blessitt says that hundreds of people have been converted in the rallies, as he urges young people to avoid getting hooked on drugs and to "turn on to Jesus and stay loaded 24 hours a day."

When he arrived in Oklahoma City, Blessitt headed for the local hippie area, a two-block strip of psychedelic shops, boutiques and coffee houses. After "rapping" (talking) with the people there, Blessitt called them to prayer right in the street.

Two hippies, one white youth called Lerch (real name Steve Guinn) and a Negro called Cinnamon (real name David Joiner) both gave out a shout. Steve, who later admitted he had used and pushed dope, explained what happened to a television reporter, saying: "Why man, I just flashed--the greatest flash I've ever had, and I've had a lot of them. But this is the greatest. Man, Jesus is the greatest. He's saved me."

Later, at a citywide rally in the Oklahoma City Civic Center Music Hall, Blessitt called Steve and David to the stage and they repeated their testimonies. The next night David returned, cleaned up, shaved and wearing a suit.

The Mississippi-born evangelist held rallies on two nights in Oklahoma City and stayed over to preach at the Sunday evening service of First Baptist Church here before a packed house, including hippie-type youth who normally never came to church. During the rallies, 24 people made professions of faith at the first night, and 61 were converted on the second night.

In his sermon at the music hall, Blessitt repeated his advice to young people that "the best way to turn off drugs is to turn on Jesus." To the Christians present, he called for more boldness in witnessing about Jesus.

Blessitt said that instead of shutting their eyes to "Playboy" magazine and pornographic materials on the bookstands, Christians ought to carry gospel tracts and slip them between the pages of such publications. "But don't peek now," he quipped.

He said Christians ought to put tracts in with their checks when they pay their bills by mail, and pray that "some secretary will be saved because of it." He pleaded, "We've got to get the word of God out."

Blessitt's preaching was credited with mending a broken marriage between Don and Jan Parkham, whose divorce was finalized on the day before they each attended (separately) the first rally Blessitt held here. Both made decisions that night.

"I was doing red (barbiturates) last Friday and Saturday, and Sunday I was high on grass (marijuana)," Don said. "When he (Blessitt) started talking about them on Wednesday night, it was the key that fit the door."

"Drugs make you high, but Christ makes you higher," he said. "And with Jesus, you stay high all the time," Jan added.

During the second rally, Don and Jan were re-married by Blessitt, who performed the ceremony up until the point of pronouncing them man and wife. At that time, an Oklahoma City Baptist minister made it legal.

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Blessitt's boldness in witnessing showed through when he was interviewed on a daytime television talk show. Suddenly in the middle of a sentence, he asked the show's host, "Are you saved, Danny?" Taken back by the question, the host replied, "Why I don't know, I just might be." To this Blessitt said, "Well, I tell you what, if you're not we can tie it up right here." After they were off the air, the interviewer asked Blessitt to stay at the station and talk with him.

Looking like a "clean hippie," Blessitt wore leather bell-bottom trousers, a semi-see-through floral shirt, a leather fringed vest and boots. A medallion protruding the peace symbol topped by a cross hung from a leather thong around his neck.

Throughout the trek to Washington, Blessitt preaches wherever the opportunity presents itself--in shopping centers, churches, schools, colleges and city auditoriums.

The unconventional evangelist launched the march to Washington on Christmas Day. He hopes to climax his march with a mass prayer rally at the Washington Monument on July 18-19, with a half-million people present.

For those who can't go to Washington, Blessitt is asking that they keep their churches open on July 18-19 for prayer. He also is encouraging fellowship prayer meetings and brotherhood projects of community help, and for people to send gifts for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare to give out.

The cross he and his companions are carrying on the march is the same wooden cross to which Blessitt chained himself last summer in a 28-day fast and protest to being evicted from the building housing his "Christian nightclub" named "His Place." The cross has two small wheels at its base and is carried or pulled by two members of the group at a time. They walk in two-hour shifts averaging about six miles per shift.

"This cross represents the crisis of our nation, and the Christ of the crisis," Blessitt explains. "We're walking to signify the simplicity of the message and person of Jesus the Christ."

Two of the four young men accompanying the 29-year-old preacher also play musical instruments and sing in a group called "The Eternal Rush." They are O. J. Peterson of Phoenix and Jim McPheeters of Seattle. Also helping to walk the cross to Washington are Jesse Wise of Pueblo, Col., and Ramsey Gilcrease of Louisiana.

Blessitt's wife, Sherry, and their three children, ranging in age from seven months to five years, are also making the trek and living in a camper along the way.

While Blessitt is away from Sunset Strip his work there in the Christian nightclub and the House of Disciples, half-way house for converted drug addicts, is being carried on by Ed Human and Dale Larson, co-directors and full-time staff of six other workers.

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BP PHOTO mailed to Baptist state papers.

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National Student Department
Reorganizes Staff Assignments

3/9/70

NASHVILLE (BP)--The student department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board has reorganized its personnel assignments.

"The reorganization resulted from a continuing evaluation of the best uses of personnel resources in the department," said Charles Roselle, secretary of the department.

"These changes express what the state conventions wanted and needed in way of support and help from our department," Roselle said.

Announcement of the reorganization came only a few weeks after the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee had received the results of a two-year depth study of SBC student work. The study recommended that the responsibility of the national program remain with the SBC Sunday School Board, with structure and organization changes.

Roselle said that the reorganization of the staff, however, was not directly connected with recommendations from the national study committee, but rather was being planned by the board even before the committee made its recommendations.

Roselle added that he hoped the reorganization would give a stronger national base of operation as Southern Baptist seek to reach more of the nation's 2,500 colleges and universities with a Baptist Student Union ministry.

Though there were 40 new BSU organizations established during 1969, Roselle said "campuses are being built at a much faster rate than we are able to establish campus student

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He said that volunteer student directors have helped fill the needs, and pointed out that the number of volunteer directors doubled from 90 to 102 in 1969. Volunteer student directors include pastors, graduate students, real estate men, homemakers, and seminary students.

Under the reorganized staff arrangements, Ed Rollins, a veteran of 17 years of student work and former California state student director, will direct the work of consultants from within the department. Rollins is also manager of the department, which frees Roselle for work in various state conventions.

Roselle, former state student director in Tennessee, has visited nearly every state director in the denomination since taking office a year ago and has compiled the names of campuses in need of a BSU ministry.

Gene Bolin, a consultant in new work development will head the department's effort to establish new BSU organizations wherever a campus need exists. Bolin is a former state student director for the Oregon-Washington convention.

Jerry Buckner will be consultant in campus ministries. He will work with state student work directors in religious emphasis weeks and focus weeks on campuses. He will make program suggestions and will work with persons participating on campus focus week or religious emphasis week teams.

For the first time in history, a black person will be hired to work as a consultant in campus ministries. Roselle said the department is seeking such a staff person at the present.

Another added staff position is that of consultant, campus evangelism. The department is currently seeking a person to fill this position. He will work cooperatively with the Home Mission Board's division of evangelism in developing materials and training leadership.

Doyle Baird will serve as consultant, church-campus ministries. His job is to communicate opportunities for the local church and campus student ministries to work together. His major responsibilities will include orientation for college, Student Night at Christmas, On-to-College and conferences for persons who work with students in the local church.

Miss Nell Magee will serve as consultant, leadership development of students. Art Driscoll will serve as consultant, leadership development of campus directors. Their work will involve preparation of leadership on campuses where BSU ministries are established.

Bill Junker will serve as director, editorial services. His job is to edit publications and supervise the work of Norman Bowman, editor student publications; Miss Denise Jones, assistant editor, and Miss Gladys Heigs, assistant editor.

Miss Sybil Johnson will serve as supervisor and office assistant. She will direct work of clerical workers and editorial assistants.

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"Affirming the Bible"
Conference Set in Denver

3/9/70

DENVER (BP)--Stating that "we want Southern Baptist liberals to know that there is a limit to our patience," the editor of The Word and Way, weekly newspaper in Jefferson City, Mo., has called a meeting tagged "Affirming the Bible Conference" in Denver on Saturday, May 30, prior to the Southern Baptist Convention, June 1-4.

W. Ross Edwards, editor of the Missouri Baptist Convention's weekly newspaper, wrote in an editorial that "we are determined to put up our flag for the trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures."

The "Affirming the Bible Conference" Edwards has called would meet at First Southern Baptist Church, 16th and Pearl, starting at 1:00 p.m., and ending at about 9:30 p.m., on Saturday, May 30. The SBC itself gets underway Monday evening, June 1.

O. L. Bayless, editor of the Rocky Mountain Baptist, the state Baptist weekly newspaper in Colorado listed on the program of the meeting as chairman of arrangements, said he and Edwards were expecting 400 to 500 persons to attend.

Edwards, in his editorial announcing the program for the meeting, said it seemed to him Southern Baptists have a "silent majority" and it was this "silent majority" he was inviting to the conference.

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Since the 1962 Southern Baptist Convention in San Francisco, a small minority of more liberal Southern Baptists have been increasingly vocal, Edwards wrote. "We have been waiting for some sign that the more liberal element in our midst would show some restraint."

"Affirming the Bible Conference" would be an alternative to another pre-convention meeting planned last year at the New Orleans convention by the E. Y. Mullins Fellowship.

Edwards said there would be no effort to create a new organization with elected officers as a result of the conference, and that it probably would be a one-time session, with no plans for annual meetings.

Among the major speakers for the meeting will be K. Owen White of Tuscon, Ariz., former president of the Southern Baptist Convention who led an effort at the SBC meeting in San Francisco in 1962 to reaffirm the Bible as "infallible," and to ask SBC seminary trustees to take steps to remedy situations where this view is not accepted by professors. White will speak on the subject, "Southern Baptists and the Bible."

Other speakers and their general subject areas include Jimmy R. Allen, pastor, First Baptist Church, San Antonio, and president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, (The bible and ethics); Tal Bonham, pastor, Southside Baptist Church, Pine Bluff, Ark., (prophecy); Ralph Smith, pastor, Hyde Park Baptist Church, Austin, Tex., (the church); Roy Fish, professor, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, (evangelism); Joe T. Odle, editor, the Baptist Record, Jackson, Miss., (Baptist literature); and Charles Ashcraft, executive secretary, Arkansas Baptist Convention, Little Rock, (missions).

The final speaker for the conference is yet to be announced. In addition, two devotionals are scheduled by Glen Braswell, executive secretary of the Colorado Baptist General Convention, Denver, and by Eugene Whitlow, editor, the Baptist New Mexican, Albuquerque, N.M.

Edwards said that no formal committee or organization had been created to sponsor the meeting. "I guess I was more responsible than any other single individual," he said.

Edwards said in a telephone interview he had talked to several other editors of Baptist state papers during a meeting of the editors in San Antonio, and they decided such a conference would be a good thing. Among the Baptist state papers who were in on the initial planning for the meeting were Editors Bayless of Colorado, Odle of Mississippi, Whitlow of New Mexico and Jack Gritz of the Baptist Messenger in Oklahoma.



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HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC

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HIS CROSS IS HEAVY: Arthur Blessitt (right), ~~min~~ Southern Baptist "minister of Sunset Strip" in Hollywood, and Jesse Wise (left), one of his staff ~~min~~ members, trudge along Interstate 40 near Oklahoma City on a 2,600 mile hike from California to Washington, D. C. Along the way, they are carrying an 80-pound cross. The march is to demonstrate America's need for ~~spiritual awakening~~ a spiritual awakening, Blessitt says. (BP) Photo by Bob Matthews

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To The Editor;

Your editorial on the seminar being sponsored in Atlanta by the Christian Life Commission was bad enough, but the reply to the letter from Elmer West of that organization was a little too much.