



BAPTIST PRESS
News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

NATIONAL OFFICE
460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
Telephone (615) 244-2355
W. C. Fields, Director
Jim Newton, Assistant Director

BUREAUS

ATLANTA Walker L. Knight, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30309, Telephone (404) 873-4041
DALLAS Billy Keith, Chief, 103 Baptist Building, Dallas, Texas 75201, Telephone (214) 741-1996
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lynn M. Davis, Jr., Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37203, Telephone (615) 254-1631
RICHMOND Jesse C. Fletcher, Acting Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va. 23230, Telephone (703) 353-0151
WASHINGTON W. Barry Garrett, Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

March 27, 1970

Jacksonville Church Reenacts
Crucifixion Through Drama

by James Evans McReynolds

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (BP)--The figure on the center cross appears beaten and bloody.

Sweat runs down his face.

"Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" the choir sings.

Tears fall from the faces of women, children and some men, who are looking on.

The audience gets so close emotionally to the real events of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ that some faint. Few leave unmoved.

The drama which attracts thousands of persons each Easter was written by R. M. Coolidge, pastor of Highlands Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

The actors, costume designers, directors, propmen and carpenters are some 200 members of the Highlands Church.

"You feel as if you are there sharing the guilt and ugliness of the thing that is happening," an observer said.

This is the third year the church has presented the drama. Coolidge wrote his script in 1951 while he served North Edgefield Baptist Church, Nashville, Tenn., as pastor.

He introduced the drama to audiences in Jacksonville when he became pastor of the Franklin Street Baptist Church.

Since then the passion drama has become a part of the church's ministry.

The Franklin Street Church continues to present the drama at sunrise each Easter from Coolidge's original script.

The drama is presented with original scenery on and around a large sand dune where scenes take place in a semi-circle.

"One man in the crowd of spectators became so involved during the crucifixion scene that he actually tried to stop the crucifixion," Coolidge related.

"Another blind man in the congregation standing with thousands of other people...said, 'This is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen,'" Coolidge added.

The scenes are made as realistic as possible. "Even the donkeys cooperate. Their 'hee-haws' add a touch of reality to the drama," he said.

In their helmets and armor, actors playing Roman soldiers gallop by on horseback.

The actors portraying Christ and the thieves appear nailed to their crosses. The crosses have support bases for the feet. There are holders on the sides in which the actors slip their hands.

"From a distance of ten feet, the audience cannot perceive that the actors are not nailed to the crosses," Coolidge said.

In the scene where Christ is beaten, the whip has a red substance within the leather and fake spikes. This substance makes red marks on the body that looks like blood and whelp marks.

The spear thrown into the actor's side is also a professional prop. A syringe on the point of the spear contains the red chemical substance used in the beating scene.

As the spear is thrown into the actor's padded side, what appears to be blood and water pour from the point into which the spear is tossed.

"We believe that what people see makes an impression on the mind that is not soon forgotten," Coolidge related.

In one scene one of the thieves crucified with Jesus resists as the soldiers try to nail him to his cross. The struggle adds graphic understanding to the horror of Christ's death.

Coolidge continues to add a scene or two each year. He introduced the scene where Judas hanged himself last year. It was so realistic that one of the actors screamed on impulse as the actor playing Judas leaped to his "death."

Some people drive hundreds of miles to see the drama, according to Coolidge. It is presented twice on Easter day, at sunrise and at sunset.

More than 150 Highlands Baptist Church members work all night to put finishing touches on costumes, beards, make-up and props.

Work starts almost immediately after the performance for the next year's presentation. Rehearsals come on Saturday afternoons several weeks before the drama is presented.

"Our people work tirelessly day and night to prepare this drama. They have seen what it can mean in the lives of those in the audience.

"It has the most powerful impact on a crowd of people of anything I have ever seen during my ministry," Coolidge said.

-30-

Armed Forces Network
To Carry Baptist Show

3/27/70

FORT WORTH (BP)--The Armed Forces Television Service has been granted permission to use the folk music television production, "Tell It Like It Is," on their networks.

The television service, which has six networks and 49 television stations around the world, was granted use of the television program by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission here, which produced the program.

The production, which was broadcast nationally on Feb. 1, by the National Broadcasting Co., was carried by more than 90 per cent of the NBC-affiliate stations on Sunday afternoon. It was the largest number to carry one of the SBC Radio-TV Commission's productions.

It was written by Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser, and performed by a student group from Baylor University, Waco, Tex.

According to Paul M. Stevens, executive director of the SBC Radio-TV Commission, the program has received enthusiastic endorsement from the viewing audience across the country.

Stevens said the commission has received more than 4,500 letters about the program, only 49 of them critical. The criticism has come from Baptists who did not like the choreography used in the presentation.

Letters praising the program have come from 46 states and from people of many different faith groups, Stevens reported.

Heaviest response was from Texas, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, California, Florida, New York, Michigan and Indiana. Stevens interpreted this as an indication of how successfully the program communicated with persons outside the traditional "Bible Belt."

-30-

Lankford Named President
For Hargrave Academy

3/27/70

CHATHAM, Va. (BP)--Vernon T. Lankford, academic dean and assistant to the president at Hargrave Military Academy here since 1951, has been named new president of the academy, effective July 1.

Lankford succeeds Col. Joseph H. Cosby, who is retiring from the 61-year-old preparatory school this summer after 19 years with the academy.

The new president becomes the first alumnus to serve as president of the academy, and the fourth president. He is a graduate at Richmond College, and Columbia University's Teachers College.

-more-

After serving in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific during World War II, he taught in public schools and returned to Hargrave Military Academy in 1958 as an English instructor. He has been with the academy since that time.

Hargrave Military Academy is one of three preparatory academies affiliated with the Baptist General Association of Virginia.

-30-

Symposium on "Baptists In
American Culture" Slated

3/27/70

WACO, Tex. (BP)--Baylor University, the nation's largest Baptist university, has extended its celebration of the school's 125th anniversary by scheduling a symposium on "Baptists in American Culture," April 24-25.

The symposium will deal with the role of Baptists in American life from both the historical and contemporary perspectives, Baylor officials said.

Participating in the symposium will be Robert G. Torbet, executive director of the Division of Cooperative Christianity for the American Baptist Convention, Valley Forge, Pa.; Edwin S. Gaustad, history department chairman at the University of California, Riverside campus; Samuel H. Hill Jr., religion department chairman at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Winthrop S. Hudson, professor of the History of Christianity at Colgate Rochester Divinity School, Rochester, N.Y.; and LeRoy Moore Jr., church history professor at the Hartford Seminary Foundation, Hartford, Conn.

-30-

Edinburgh Scholar Slates
Lectures at Midwestern

3/27/70

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (BP)--G. W. Anderson, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the University of Edinburgh, will deliver a special series of lectures at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here April 7-10.

Anderson, author and translator of several books and numerous articles on the Old Testament, has been president of the British Society for Old Testament Study.

He has taught at Edinburgh since 1962.

-30-



BAPTIST PRESS

*460 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37219*

DAVIS C. WOOLLEY HO
HISTORICAL COMMISSION
127 NINTH AVE. N.
NASHVILLE, TENN. 37203

RECEIVED
MAR 30 1970

HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC