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News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention

# ---FEATURES

produced by Baptist Press

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April 28, 1970

Spiritual Resurgence Cited  
Among Texas Baptist Youth

RECEIVED  
APR 29 1970

HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SBC

by Robert O'Brien  
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DALLAS (BP)--A religious phenomenon--with youth at its hub--has swept Texas in recent months and raised speculation among Texas Baptist leaders that a spiritual awakening of far-reaching implications may be underway.

Some observable manifestations have included two record-shattering revivals at Baptist churches in Irving and Pasadena, Tex., a city wide revival with 1,354 conversions in Waco, Tex., and what has been called a "spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit" on the campuses of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, and Texas A&M University in College Station, Tex.

The two church revivals, conducted almost back-to-back by Evangelist James Robison of Hurst, Tex., produced 708 professions of faith at Plymouth Park Baptist Church in Irving and 861 professions of faith at First Baptist Church in Pasadena.

Texas and Southern Baptist Convention evangelism leaders said after each meeting that the figures broke all known records for professions of faith at a week-long Baptist church revival. Irving is a suburb of Dallas and Pasadena is a Houston suburb.

At the Pasadena church, only 16 of the 861 professions were from persons under 13 years old and only 12 were from adults, according to the pastor, L. D. Morgan. The large majority came from high school students.

In Irving, Pastor Don Dyer had the following partial breakdown of the 708 professions: 400 from teenagers in grades 7 through 12 and 200 from young adults under 35 years of age. Only a small number were from children under 11.

The eight-day city-wide crusade in Waco, also conducted by Robison, produced a total of 1,354 professions of faith, but results are too recent for an accurate analysis or age breakdown. Observers there said a large percentage of the conversions were among teenagers.

Similar results could be reported from crusades at the First Baptist Churches of Abilene and Lake Jackson, Tex., which reported 150 and 380 professions of faith respectively; and by the Texas Baptist Evangelism Division, which recorded 339 professions in an experimental Youth Encounter Crusade in Tyler, Tex.

The "spiritual happening" at Southwestern Seminary took on an entirely different tone. Observers say the extent of its impact is hard to measure although they point to noticeable results.

The Southwestern phenomenon resembled in smaller degree that which swept the students and faculty last February at Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary, independent Wesleyan schools in Wilmore, Ky. The Asbury happening shut classes down for a week and spilled over into other campuses and communities from coast to coast, according to widespread reports.

In fact, according to Roy Fish of the Southwestern faculty, it spilled over onto the Baptist seminary's campus in March.

"Some faculty members and students here at Southwestern Seminary began two or three years ago to pray for spiritual renewal on campus," Fish said. "After hearing about the results at Asbury, we invited some of the students to come and share the experience with us. They did so, not only on the campus but in at least seven churches around Fort Worth."

During the course of several days, at meetings ranging in length from two to nine hours on campus and in local churches, three young pastors' wives were among many who made professions of faith. Many other persons said their lives had taken on new meaning.

Some students, Fish said, admitted cheating on class work and were given the opportunity to correct their mistakes.

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"From the standpoint of the apparent evidence of unusual work of the Holy Spirit, this is the greatest response I've ever seen," said Fish professor of evangelism and former pastor for 14 years.

The meeting at Texas A&M, sponsored by the Baptist Student Union as a revival, exhibited the same evidence of a spiritual presence and open confessions of cheating and animosities, according to BSU Director Bob Burch.

Full information is not available on the city crusade in Waco and the church crusades in Abilene and Lake Jackson, but the other occurrences, although entirely unrelated, each have at least 10 aspects in common.

1. Reliable, objective observers have emphasized the absence of "cheap emotionalism." Fish summed up the range of opinion like this: "There has been depth and warmth of honest emotion exhibited but nothing that overemotionalized or cheapened the experience."

2. Those involved evaluated the results cautiously but most see the beginnings of a possible spiritual awakening of widespread proportions.

Dyer said, "I think we are seeing the first indications of a sweeping revival. Our young people have experienced something that I have never seen among young people in 20 years as a pastor."

"When we read of the history of revivals, ...very little is said about the beginning stages of a movement like this," said C. Wade Freeman, director of the Texas Baptist evangelism division. "However, I believe we are at the moment of beginning in Texas and throughout the United States."

Fish, a student of the history of revival, had this evaluation: "Spiritual renewal is like a tide. It goes out and no one knows how long it will stay out. I think the awakenings at Asbury, Southwestern and many other places are evidence the tide is coming in. I think the decade of the 70s will be a decade of spiritual renewal."

3. The revival phenomenon from coast to coast and throughout Texas, no matter what its form, has centered among young people--mostly on high school, college and seminary levels.

Many observers, from Billy Graham to spokesmen for non-Christian faiths, have traced the modern unrest of youth to spiritual hunger.

"Young people," Evangelist Robison observed, "are restless and they are in the process of doing something, taking the lead boldly in doing either what is wrong or what is right. It depends on how they are pointed. I think a spiritual awakening will begin among young people and lead America back to God."

4. The revivals are not persons centered, like so many of the great revivals of history, nor are they clustered about an organization.

Although Robison has been given much credit for his forceful presentations in pre-revival meetings in high school assemblies and during the revival services in Irving, Pasadena and Waco, the widespread phenomenon cannot be tagged to a Robison, a Wesley, a Spurgeon or a Graham, observers pointed out. It has taken on too many spontaneous manifestations over a wide area.

"It is taking place in more spots than it has in my ministry, which embraces 23 years," said Freeman.

5. Unanimously, observers have noted a lack of pressure tactics in either the church revivals or other spiritual encounters. The experience at Southwestern Seminary, for example, centered on low key personal testimony.

As indicated by the age of those responding in the churches and at the encounter crusade it appears no high pressure child evangelistic tactics were applied to propel unprepared children down the aisles.

6. Although the spiritual power was characterized by its spontaneity, extensive and prayerful preparation was in evidence.

In the church revivals and the Youth Encounter Crusade, young people were mobilized. Weeks of training, publicity and preparation had laid the groundwork.

7. Although enough time has not elapsed for long range evaluation, each observer reports a change in the quality of life of those affected by what Fish called "a true spiritual bath."

Observers report that those effected have almost universally spoken of a new never-before-experience depth in their love for others. Personal hatreds and rifts of longstanding have reportedly dissolved among many young people effected by the spiritual power.

Dyer said, "I've been told that the revival at Plymouth Park Church has changed the whole atmosphere of the high schools in our city and disciplinary problems have decreased and that problems of drug abuse are not nearly as great as they once were."

Although church attendance cannot be equated with personal quality of life, it has skyrocketed at the churches involved in revival.

In Texas in general, a related factor has been the rise in baptisms. In 1969, baptisms in Texas increased by 1,687 over 1968--rising from 54,720 to 56,407. Across the Southern Baptist Convention, however, the corresponding figures for 1968 and 1969 dropped from 373,025 to 368,225. No figures are yet available in 1970.

Both Burch and Fish have noted a new quality of Christian discipleship and joy among students involved in the meetings.

8. Personal testimony played a key role in each situation. That was the only element involved in the Southwestern and Texas A&M situations. In the formal crusades, young people witnessed their faith to classmates in large numbers in the high schools.

Commenting on the Plymouth Park situations, Freeman said, "I suppose four-fifths of those who made professions of faith had already been instructed by people who were doing personal work--by their school mates."

At A&M, Burch said students fanned out into the dorms after each revival meeting to witness to classmates. "We've done this before," he pointed out, "but this time it happened with a renewed eagerness to win others to Christ."

9. Results of the revivals have, paradoxically to some, evolved upward to adults from young people, rather than vice versa.

"No movement that I can recall in religious history," Freeman said, "ever began quite like this one appears to be beginning. In previous experiences it has evolved from adults, but this time it seems to be moving with the teenagers and evolving upward to older people."

10. Personal skepticism has crumbled among many who went to meetings preconditioned to scoff at "hocus pocus."

"Many who looked at the situation at Southwestern Seminary with skeptical eyes went away with a new outlook," Fish reported. "I have been told by many that they have really learned what the Holy Spirit can do."

The examples and observations cited are not exhaustive, and the task of "objectively reporting" the spiritual phenomenon now sweeping Texas is, as one person put it, "as difficult as capturing moonbeams."

But those who say their lives have been permanently altered by an upsurge of spiritual power, emphasize they need no "objective report" to verify what happened.

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Waco Evangelistic Crusade  
Results in 1,354 Conversions

WACO, Tex. (BP)--A city-wide evangelistic crusade at the Heart O' Texas Coliseum here led by Evangelist James Robison has produced 1,354 professions of faith.

Although results of the eight-day crusade, sponsored by the Waco Baptist Association, have not yet been analyzed, observers here said the largest percentage of professions came from young people.

Robison is the evangelist who led record-breaking one-week church revivals earlier this year, which produced 708 professions of faith at Plymouth Park Baptist Church, Irving, Tex., and 861 at First Baptist Church, Pasadena, Tex. Most of the conversions on those occasions were from teenagers.

Total decisions at the crusade were 1,863.

The Waco Crusade is one of a series of revivals which have been spreading among youth across Texas and in other parts of the United States, Texas Baptist evangelism leaders said.

Robison hasn't been involved in all the occurrences, but the 26-year-old evangelist has preached about 300 crusades in his career to composite crowds of more than four million.

As in most of his crusades, much of Robison's success in Waco has been attributed to his pre-revival talks in high school assemblies, officials said.

Spicing his comments with humor, Robison talks in the assemblies about morals--dealing with problems such as drug abuse, free love and intoxicants. He does not use the biblical scriptures in his talks in the high schools, saving that for the crusade worship services.

His talks often draw standing ovations from the youngsters, widespread favorable comment from school officials and large crowds of teenagers at the worship services, observers noted.



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