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JUNE 21, 1971

Baptist Chapel Burned; Congregation Threatened

By Ted Lindwall

PANAJACHEL, GUATEMALA (BP)--A newly constructed Baptist chapel in Northern Guatemala was burned to the ground, culminating months of threats and abuse suffered by the young Kekchi Indian Baptist congregation.

The chapel, located in Pocola, was dedicated May 23. That night about 100 members of the non-Christian community gathered around the building, shouting at the Christians inside and breaking the windows with machetes.

They threatened to burn the building with all those who were inside, and they threatened the lives of the missionaries if they returned. In previous weeks individual members of the congregation had been attacked and their houses and possessions damaged.

The chapel, however, was set on fire at a time when no members were present. Not until the next morning did the members discover that the building had been destroyed. They informed missionary Wendall C. Parker, who was accompanied by Guatemalan law officers to the scene.

Four leaders in the attack upon the church have been arrested so far and await trial. The Guatemalan Constitution maintains separation of church and state and guarantees religious freedom to all its citizens.

The mission in Pocola is a product of the "people movement" toward Christ among the Kekchi Indians in Northern Guatemala. In April 1970, four young men from that rural community went into the jungle to help Kekchi Baptist settlers with their planting. During their brief stay, these four youths heard the gospel for the first time and committed their lives to Christ. They soon returned to their community and began witnessing to others.

In the past year, 35 persons have accepted Christ in that area and are awaiting baptism. Leaders of the traditional religion of the area, a mixture of Mayan beliefs and Catholicism, have bitterly opposed the movement. However, the new believers have held firmly to their faith.

In addition to evangelizing their neighbors and relatives, the members of this young congregation got permission from owners of the local coffee plantation to build a chapel on the plantation. They used their own tithes and offerings and donated labor for the building.

They asked their mother church to send them a pastor, offering to build a parsonage and support him. It is probable that the church will be able to supply this need.

Southern Baptist missionaries first entered the Kekchi Indian field of Guatemala in 1964. The first Kekchi Baptist congregation was formed early the next year with the baptism of 18 men and women in a coffee washing tank in Chajcar.

Within two years all of these first believers had migrated to the jungle area of northern Alta Verapaz Department (state), establishing Baptist missions wherever they settled.

Today there are about 12 Baptist congregations in this area, and the missionary spirit of the Baptist people shows little sign of abatement.

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Southern Baptists currently have two missionary families in Alta Verapaz working with both Kekchi and Spanish-language congregations.

The Richard R. Greenwoods, who transferred to Alta Verapaz in 1967, are able to teach and preach in the Kekchi language as well as in Spanish. Greenwood reported the burning of the Pocola chapel.

The Wendall C. Parker family transferred to Alta Verapaz early this year and is currently studying Kekchi with Wycliffe Bible Translators Ruth Carlson and Fran Eachus.

The Donnell N. Courtneys are expected to move onto the Kekchi field as soon as they finish Spanish language school in Costa Rica.

When the missionaries were asked to speculate on the probable effect of the persecution of Baptists in Pocola, they said that in the long run it would probably strengthen the work rather than weaken it.

Recently, the Kekchi-speaking Baptists of Alta Verapaz were to have gathered on a river bank in a cleared area of the jungle for their annual conference. They planned their own program and will cover all expenses.

One missionary expressed the belief that at the close of the week-long meeting all of the men would go to Pocola to help the congregation rebuild its chapel and to evangelize the non-Christian families in the valley.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Ted (Hubert N.) Lindwall is a Southern Baptist missionary stationed in Panajachel, Guatemala. He is a field missionary for the Lake Atitlan area and director of the Paul Bell Baptist Bible Institute, near Santiago Atitlan.

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Former SBC Missionary To Cuba
To Head Seminary Continuing Ed

6/22/71

FORT WORTH (BP)--David Fite, a former Southern Baptist missionary imprisoned in Cuba for 42 months, has been named director of the newly-created department of continuing education at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary here.

Fite, a native of Fort Worth, was a missionary in Cuba until 1969 when he returned to the United States after 42 months imprisonment by the Castro regime on charges of illegal currency exchange and espionage.

Since his return, he has been studying at Southwestern Seminary where he has completed class work requirements for the doctor of theology degree and is now preparing his dissertation.

He will assume the newly-created post on July 1, according to an announcement by Seminary President Robert E. Naylor.

Seminary officials believe the new department is the first of its kind among Southern Baptist seminaries with a full-time director of continuing education who has faculty status.

"Our continuing education for ministry program is designed to help Christian ministers update and expand their education in a variety of settings and to assist them in maintaining an effective ministry in a constantly changing contemporary situation," Naylor said.

The president added that Fite will correlate the various programs Southwestern already sponsors and will plan and coordinate new approaches to continuing education.

Fite added that "ministers need to constantly add to their knowledge, and Southwestern has great potential for making its resources available to its graduates, other ministers and the community."

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The new department was created by vote of the faculty, administration and trustees after an extensive study of the program by a faculty committee headed by LeRoy Ford, professor of programmed instruction at the seminary.

Ford emphasized that the new program will be designed to help all professional Christian workers. "We began our study with the concept of 'continuing theological education,' but along the way our emphasis shifted to 'continuing education for ministry,' which broadens our perspective," he said.

Under the plan for the new department, current continuing education programs will be continued under the aegis of the new department. Ford cited such things as an annual lecture series to which local ministers are invited, numerous clinics and workshops in the seminary's three schools, library resources made available to former students, etc.

Fite said he had plans for several new programs, both on-campus and off-campus.

"We will give special attention to the development of short-term, on-campus institutes for credit--studies of contemporary issues and developments which confront the Christian minister," Fite said.

Other approaches will include supervised independent study, off-campus short-term institutes, traveling learning laboratories, special night courses, and self-directed groups.

A graduate of Mercer University, Macon, Ga., and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, N. C. Fite has studied at Southwestern since a few months after his release from Cuba.

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Retired Union University
President, Jones, Dies

6/22/71

WINTER PARK, Fla. (BP)--Funeral services were held here for Warren Jones, former president of Union University in Jackson, Tenn., on Sunday, June 20.

Since retirement, Jones had been an education consultant, helping several Baptist schools in the area of recruitment and accreditation. He is a former member of the Southern Baptist Education Commission.

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