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September 1, 1971

**Fire Destroys Fruitland Institute; Arson Suspected**

**HENDERSONVILLE, N.C. (BP)**--An early morning fire, apparently set by an arsonist who has been plaguing Henderson County schools, virtually destroyed the chapel and classroom building at Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute near here. No one was injured.

The fire was discovered by a National Guard patrol at about 1:00 a.m., Aug. 30. The Guardsmen were ordered into the area after three other fires had been set in public schools here during the last 10 days.

The dean of the Baptist institute, Alex Booth, said the fire was apparently started by a fire bomb thrown through a window in the northeast classroom of the Justice Building. Other fires in the county were started in similar fashion.

The fire completely destroyed the top floor and roof of the three-story brick building and fire marshals feared the north wall of the building would collapse.

Damage was estimated at \$300,000. Only \$22,000 worth of insurance was carried on the building, built in 1901 on a wooden foundation, according to W. Perry Crouch, general secretary of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, Raleigh. It was the maximum insurance available.

The big building housed all of the 11 classrooms and chapel for the institute, which offers two years of theological training to ministers who have not been to college.

Dean Booth said the 200 students who began classes six days before the fire would be shifted temporarily to classrooms in the nearby Fruitland Baptist Church and to various areas of the school's administration building.

Institute Administrator Gary Harthcock said that the state Bureau of Investigation and Henderson County sheriff's department officers were searching for clues. They said the fires are believed to be started by fire bombs consisting of a kerosene-filled fruit jar and a wick.

Harthcock said the institute would maintain a guard over the building until the arsonist is apprehended.

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**Baptist VIEWpoll**  
 Martin B. Bradley, Director

**Leaders Alter Views on Influence of Religion**

by Ken Hayes

**NASHVILLE (BP)**--A recent survey of pastors and Sunday School teachers has revealed a dramatic change of attitude on the part of these leaders toward the influence of religion on American life.

Two surveys conducted by the Baptist VIEWpoll indicate that fewer pastors and Sunday School teachers believe this year that religion is losing its influence on American life than indicated this a year ago.

In June, 1969, the Baptist VIEWpoll learned through a national sample of pastors and Sunday School teachers that 83.6 per cent of the pastors and 79.8 per cent of the teachers felt that religion as a whole was losing its influence on American life.

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The latest poll reveals that only 56.1 per cent of the pastors and 52.6 per cent of the Sunday School teachers now feel that religion as a whole is losing its influence on American life.

This represents a drop of over 25 percentage points over a two year period of time.

The latest poll also reveals that 35.1 per cent of the pastors and 37.2 per cent of the teachers feel that religion on the whole is increasing its influence on American life.

This is to be compared to the 9.9 per cent of the pastors and 13.8 per cent of the teachers who felt this way in 1969.

Some pastors (7.6 per cent) and teachers (7.5 per cent) feel that the influence of religion on American life is staying the same today, and others (1.2 per cent of the pastors and 2.7 per cent of the teachers) had no opinion.

A recent Gallup Poll among Protestant pastors found much the same thing as the latest Baptist VIEWpoll survey. Gallup found that 58 per cent of the pastors felt that religion as a whole was losing its influence on American life, while 26 per cent felt it was increasing. Of the remaining 16 per cent, 13 per cent felt it was staying the same and 3 per cent did not have an opinion.

One panel member who feels that religion is increasing its influence on American life feels this way "because of the increased interest of the youth of the nation." Another writes, "more young people today are looking for a living God."

Among those who feel that religion is losing its influence on American life one writes: "We have become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." "Even church members are not faithful to the Lord" writes another.

Findings for the report are based on 90 per cent response from the Baptist VIEWpoll panel, composed of approximately 300 pastors and 300 Sunday School teachers selected to represent a cross section of persons holding those leadership positions in the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

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#### Blessitt Begins Carrying Cross Across British Isles, Europe

9/1/71

NEW YORK (BP)--Arthur Blessitt, Hollywood's "minister to Sunset Strip" who made headlines by carrying a cross across the United States from Hollywood to Washington, D. C., has departed for England with plans to carry his cross throughout the British Isles.

Blessitt and his team members and families said they would carry the cross through every major city in Great Britain, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Purpose of the three-month trip to the British Isles, he said, will be two-fold--evangelism, a sharing of the message of Jesus Christ; and training Christians in personal witnessing and sharing their faith.

Accompanying Blessitt will be Jim McPheters, who participated in Blessitt's walk across the U.S.A. last year; Dale Larson, who has operated "His Place," Blessitt's center on Sunset Strip in Hollywood; their wives, and four children.

He said they plan to stay in the British Isles for three months, September through December; return to the United States for a spiritual blitz in New Hampshire; and go back to Europe in the Spring to carry the cross throughout Europe, beginning in Denmark and Sweden.

The Baptist evangelist's trip to the British Isles comes at the end of a summer which he has spent preaching at Times Square, 42nd and Broadway, in Manhattan in an effort to bring "the Jesus revolution" to the nation's largest city.

Blessitt said that he had decided while he was on the trek across the United States, urging a spiritual revolution that would turn the country back to God, that God wanted him to do similar cross-country journeys in countries around the world.

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He said that he and his team planned to stay in each town for three or four days. Though he has no organization through which he was working, Blessitt indicated he had made contact with Baptist churches and other Christian groups in the cities he planned to visit.

On the itinerary for the trip will be a visit to Belfast, Northern Ireland, where Blessitt visited earlier this year, dragging a cross on both sides of the no-man's-land which separates warring Protestant and Catholic sections of the city.

This time, Blessitt said, he plans to work through churches, including both Protestant or Catholic groups. On his previous visit, he said he made no contact with churches in Northern Ireland in order to maintain a stance of strict neutrality in the religious dispute there.

Blessitt said he and his team sold their musical instruments in order to raise much of the \$2,700 necessary for the plane tickets, and that a Southern Baptist church in Washington, D.C., had contributed the remaining travel funds.

The group hopes to buy a van of some sort in which they can both travel and live when Christian homes are not available. He called the trip "a venture of faith."

Asked why he was taking his cross-carrying treks abroad, Blessitt said that although he had invitations to lead city-wide evangelistic crusades all across the United States, he felt his ministry "is basically creating and starting--moving on to where nothing is happening."

While other evangelists can go to Atlanta and lead crusades, "If I don't go to England, I don't know who will. I feel the need to go where something is not being done." He added that only 2 1/2 per cent of the people in England attend church.

Admitting that carrying the cross is somewhat of a gimmick, Blessitt said that it also is a technique that attracts the attention both of the news media and the people. Those who see him stop and ask, "What is that guy doing, and why," Blessitt said, and this opens doors for sharing faith in Jesus Christ.

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Endowments Benefit  
Southwestern Seminary

9/1/71

FORT WORTH (BP)--An endowment in excess of \$54,000 to benefit Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a \$50,000 trust fund set up to aid students attending Southwestern Seminary and Baylor University, Waco, Tex., have been created in recent weeks.

The \$50,000 trust fund for students at Southwestern and Baylor was created by Samuel W. Fisher, a retired Fort Worth certified public accountant.

During his lifetime, Fisher, a member of Broadway Baptist Church here, will draw income from the trust fund administered by the Baptist Foundation of Texas. Later, Baylor will receive two-thirds and Southwestern will receive one-third of the fund.

The \$54,000 endowment was set up by the estate of Mrs. Norma M. Simmons, a school-teacher from Eastland, Tex., and a successful stock investor. The endowment will fund student loans with income earned from investments handled by the Baptist Foundation of Texas.

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Alabama Baptists Name  
Royal Ambassador Head

9/1/71

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (BP)--David Hulsey, minister of education at First Baptist Church, Cullman, Ala., has been elected Royal Ambassador consultant in the Brotherhood department of the Alabama Baptist State Convention here.

A native of Mississippi, Hulsey is a graduate of William Carey College, Hattiesburg, Miss. and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

He was minister of education at churches in Florence, S. C., and Hattiesburg, Miss., before coming to the Alabama church.

He will direct the statewide work with Royal Ambassadors, a missionary education and service organization for boys in grades one through 12.

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