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# ---FEATURES

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Nixon Visit Spotlights  
Baptists in Eastern Europe

By C. E. Bryant

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The visit of President and Mrs. Richard M. Nixon to the Baptist Church in Moscow has focused world attention on Baptists in the U.S.S.R. C. E. Bryant, director of publications, Baptist World Alliance, Washington, D.C., provides some background on Baptist life in Eastern Europe.

The Moscow Evening News once reported "a severe outbreak" of Baptist faith among Russian young people. And the official publication of the Communist youth organization has warned its atheist readers: "Baptists are particularly dangerous, for among them the laymen are also evangelists. Every Russian Baptist tries to win adherents to his faith."

Despite discouragement from the Communist government, Baptists of the U.S.S.R. continue to be a vital, growing group. As is true of all religious groups in the Soviet Union, the Baptist congregations can meet only on approval of the government and in halls made available to them by the government. Yet they report 5,000 Baptist churches in the U.S.S.R., with a total membership of 550,000. The total "Baptist family," counting children and sympathizers is estimated at about four million.

Visitors to Russia report finding crowds of 2,000 people in attendance at the church in Moscow, which has only 1,200 seats. No service they attended lasted less than two hours, many of them as long as three hours--and even then the people left reluctantly. There are three services each Sunday, and services also on Thursday and Saturday evenings. Similar reports come from the churches at Leningrad and Kiev, the other Russian cities frequently visited by tourists.

There are no Sunday schools in the churches, because the soviet constitution reserves the right of education for the government. Yet one Baptist reported "Our homes are our Sunday schools and our grandmothers are our teachers." Young people are legally prohibited from joining the church before their eighteenth birthday.

But the Christian faith is contagious. Such faith confounds Communist leaders who had predicted that religion would disappear as older believers died and the young people were educated in atheism.

## AN INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT

No Baptist missionaries have ever been sent to Russia. How then did Baptists get their start? The first Russian Baptist of record was Nikita Veronin, a merchant in Tiflis, who somehow secured a copy of the Bible. His study of the Scriptures brought him to convictions unlike those of the Russian church, and for a while he believed he was the only person in the world with such doctrine. But in 1867, Veronin met a Lithuanian immigrant, Martin Kalweit, with whom he discussed his odd beliefs. "Oh, you are not alone," Kalweit told him. "You are a Baptist. There are thousands of people like you." Veronin was overjoyed, and started witnessing to his friends. After securing baptism at the hands of Kalweit on August 20, 1867, he set up a small church in Tiflis and called it "Baptist."

There was a similar development in St. Petersburg, at that time the capital of the Russian Empire (now Leningrad), and those converts, who carried the name of "Evangelical Christians," started evangelizing Russia from the North while the Veronin converts worked toward the center of Russia from the South.

Russian Baptists and certain other evangelicals are organized in a national association known as All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Ilya Ivanov, a senior pastor of the church in Moscow, is president. Alexei Bichkov, a representative of the younger generation (born 1928), is secretary. The All-Union Council is a member of the Baptist World Alliance. There is also an "unregistered" group of Baptists which does not hold membership in the All-Union Council.

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IN OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

Baptists are strong also in other Communist countries. Romanian Baptists number over 120,000. East German Baptists number 24,000. The 20,000 Baptists in Hungary have a strong Baptist union and seminary. Polish Baptists, numbering 2,500, have finished, with financial help from other Baptists of the world, the construction of a fine chapel and a building housing the Baptist seminary and Baptist Union offices in the center of Warsaw. Yugoslav Baptists (3,700) operate a seminary at Novi Sad. Baptists are active also in Czechoslovakia (14,200) and Bulgaria (700).

Baptist people in these and other countries meet privately in their homes when their numbers are small or public services are restricted. A police officer told a Baptist pastor in one Communist country: "I believe you are happy when one of your members dies, because his funeral gives you opportunity to preach in public."

The Communist system has, without question, placed many restrictions and obstacles on the practice of all Christian faiths. But it has not uprooted it, because Christian faith cannot be eradicated by imprisonment, discrimination and ridicule. Even as their difficulties have increased the Baptists of Communist countries have found new ways to bear their witness.

Testimony to the vigor of the Baptist witness comes in the published admission of a Russian Supreme Court Justice that open opposition to religion has proved both frustrating and futile. Harassment and harsh sentences serve only "to confirm and even increase" what he calls the people's "religious prejudices." And he cites that in cases where the state has exiled religious leaders to remote areas, "the exiles have lured residents of that area to their faith."

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\$100,000 Challenge  
Gift to Ouachita

5/30/72

LITTLE ROCK (BP)--A challenge gift of \$100,000 to the Ouachita Baptist University Advancement Campaign in the Little Rock area was announced Tuesday by R. A. "Brick" Lile, a member of the campaign executive committee.

Lile said, however, that Ouachita Baptist University would get the \$100,000 challenge gift only if campaign workers bring in an additional \$200,000 in the Little Rock area. He added that an additional \$25,000 would be given if the \$200,000 is raised by July 6.

About \$460,000 has already been pledged in the campaign, which began here March 4.

"This means that if the challenge is met," Lile said, "there is a total potential of \$325,000, which will boost the Little Rock area receipts to almost \$800,000." The goal is \$1 million.

Dr. Ben M. Elrod, vice president for development at Ouachita, said that the money for the challenge gift "has been put up by four Little Rock businessmen who have asked to remain anonymous."

Elrod added that the funds raised thusfar in the Little Rock area "have helped make it possible for Ouachita to break ground not only for a new student center, but for a new learning center as well."

The funds will also be used for the construction of a fine arts center, for strengthening and enlarging the faculty by means of raising faculty salaries, for establishing endowed chairs and distinguished and visiting professorships, for increasing the number of scholarships, and for beautification of the campus.

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Gov. Carter Proclaims  
Georgia Baptist Week

5/30/72

ATLANTA (BP)--Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter has proclaimed June 25-30, 1972, as "Georgia Baptist Convention Week," in honor of the 150th anniversary of the state's largest religious group.

In a ceremony at the state capitol, Carter signed the proclamation, noting that the anniversary "will be observed by special services in the churches of the convention's fellowship during June 25-30."

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The governor said the convention "has been dedicated to cooperative endeavors of evangelism, missions, education, and the larger Christian fellowship."

Carter's proclamation urged "all our citizens to renew our commitments of our lives and resources to Christ."

The proclamation was presented to the convention president, Dr. R. J. Robinson, Augusta, and Dr. Searcy S. Garrison, executive secretary-treasurer, Atlanta, on behalf of more than one million Georgia Baptists.

Baptists from across the state will attend anniversary day services, Thursday, June 29, 10:30 a.m., at the Baptist church in the village of Powelton in Hancock County.

The Powelton church (between Crawfordville and Sparta) was the site of the founding of the convention in 1822.

Many of the 2,952 churches of the convention will have special anniversary services on Sunday, June 25.

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Church Burned in Race Tension  
Rebuilt by Blacks and Whites

5/30/72

By Orville Scott

TEXARKANA, Tex. (BP)--Above the ashes of a Negro Baptist church burned during racial tension 14 months ago, blacks and whites dedicated here what has become known as "the house that love built."

People of two races overflowed the new sanctuary of St. Paul Baptist Church in what one speaker called "a demonstration of what's right in America."

"'What's wrong with this country?' has been asked again and again," said T. A. Patterson of Dallas, executive secretary of the 1.9 million-member Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"But we're saying to all the world here today that there is a oneness in Jesus Christ."

"This is everyones church," said St. Paul Church's youth leader, Mrs. Clara Rodgers, in a welcome address.

"We have received contributions from as far away as Vietnam," Mrs. Rodgers said. This is a monument we will dedicate and extend to the world."

Black and white Baptist volunteer laborers from several Texas cities, including staff members of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, began construction on the new building last January in "an old-fashioned log raising," using finished spruce logs trucked in from Colorado.

Pastor Lory Hildreth of Texarkana's First Baptist Church said, "Both races are working together, shoulder to shoulder, eyeball to eyeball, rebuilding in love what was destroyed in hate."

People of both races have also helped to rebuild the Mt. Orange Baptist Church, a black church also burned the same night during the rash of firebombings that accompanied racial tensions in the Texarkana schools.

St. Paul Pastor B. C. Green recalls that he and the Mt. Orange pastor had declined to open the churches as temporary schools for students expelled from the public schools during the racial conflicts.

"Our reason was that there was no organization and established curriculum in what was proposed," Green said.

Efforts by arsonists to destroy two other churches failed when an incendiary bomb fizzled beneath the pulpit of Polly Baptist Chapel, and two quick-acting Texarkana patrolmen extinguished the blaze in the New Town Baptist Church.

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The arsonists were never apprehended, and the \$5,000 reward by the Chamber of Commerce for information leading to their arrest was added to the rebuilding fund for both churches.

Contributions totalled about \$25,000. First Baptist Church of Texarkana gave \$5,000 and the Texas Baptist Cconvention presented a \$1,000 check at the St. Paul dedication.

Green said the use of the finished logs, plus volunteer labor and a mission church builder provided by Texas Baptists, resulted in a building erected for less than half of its \$110,000 appraisal.

He told the members, "I shall advise each of you today as we go into this holy house, let us not carry our prejudices, our bitterness or our strife with us. . . .

"Yes, we're tired, our hands are blistered, our feet are tired . . . but we're not spiritually tired, because the God that we serve supplies us anew every night."

Green said the response to the tragedy "has brought us closer together and made the entire community more conscious of race relations."

Larry Rose, superintendent of missions for Texas Baptists in the Texarkana area, said the cooperative venture has resulted in the "greatest spirit of cooperation that I've seen in the five years I've been in Texarkana."

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"Home" Earns American  
Film Festival Award

5/30/72

NEW YORK (BP)--"Home," a 30-minute documentary on ecology, has received a blue ribbon (first place) award in the prestigious American Film Festival competition held here last week.

The film is produced by the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission for their "Human Dimension" television series. It won the award in the festival's category, "The World We Live In," one of five cgeneral categories.

"The fact that the festival only awards one blue ribbon (for first place) and one red ribbon in each category makes it a coveted award by film makers," observed John C. Stevens, who produced and directed the film for the Radio and Television Commission.

Music for the film was composed by Bob Farrar of Gwainsound in Dallas. The film was edited by Sam Russell, also of Dallas.

The film was in competition with educational television films produced by National Broadcasting Company, Time-Life, McGraw Hill, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and other major film producers.

Copies of winning films are to be distributed to libraries across the nation.

Home depicts the ecological crisis through scenes of modern pollution presented in contrast with an Indian Chief's heartfelt love for his natural environment.

Truett Myers, head of the Television Production Services of the Radio and Television Commission, accepted the award for the Commission. Paul M. Stevens is executive director.

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