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Spiritual Awakening Cracks  
Barriers in Sierra Leone

By Robert O'Brien

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (BP)--A remarkable series of events, culminating in the largest evangelistic crusade in Sierra Leone's history, has sparked a spiritual awakening which observers feel will have a long range impact on this West African country.

The New Life Crusade here, preached by Billie Hanks Jr. of Fort Worth, Tex., a Southern Baptist who has gained a reputation as America's youngest international evangelist, resulted in 1,366 professions of faith in Jesus Christ and 2,600 other decisions.

By Western standards, those statistics rank as good, but are not unprecedented. But local Christians and missionary representatives in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, view it as phenomenal for their tiny West African nation.

Sierra Leone was actually the first African nation to hear the Christian gospel, beginning in the late 1700's when Britain set up Freetown as a haven for freed slaves.

But, after a period of missionary activity, evangelistic fervor withered, church growth atrophied and most congregations retreated into dry formalism. They made little impact on a culture dominated by Islam, animistic spirit worship and secret devil societies.

Against this background, Hanks began the 12-day crusade in Brookfields Stadium. In a country where few people own automobiles, 20,000 persons came to hear the evangelist's spirited, Bible-based messages.

On the final night, a peak attendance of 4,000, including the Anglican Archbishop of West Africa and Sierra Leone's minister of labor, turned out to hear the "old time gospel."

But a series of seemingly unrelated events had converged in remarkable fashion and worked together to make that moment possible.

In early 1973, for example, circumstance brought Hanks and Joseph Mans, a Sierra Leonean national Baptist, together in Ethiopia. Back in Freetown, longstanding barriers were eroding to produce the "spiritual cement" which would make possible the planning and follow-up of the New Life Crusade, the first cooperative, interfaith effort in the city's 187-year history. And, unexpectedly, Arthur Blessitt, America's itinerant, cross-carrying Jesus Movement exponent, also played a role.

Mans, Sierra Leone's general secretary of New Life for All, a decentralized spiritual renewal movement now working in 26 African nations, heard Hanks preach in a crusade in Asmara, Ethiopia, and invited him to bring the same message to Sierra Leone.

That meeting came at a crucial time when Mans and other Christians in Freetown had begun to detect the first signs of a spiritual awakening cracking what they had felt was "an impenetrable barrier of Satanic power."

Preliminary trips to Freetown by Hanks and Calvin Katter, a representative of the Minnesota Bible Fellowship, set the stage for a crusade sponsored by New Life for All.

Local media and city and national government officials exhibited keen interest, which heightened as Sierra Leoneans, responding to Hanks' invitation to accept Christ, swarmed around the platform in a manner veteran observers say is unprecedented in Sierra Leone.

A "devil man" of a secret society of the Mende Tribe in Sierra Leone's remote out-country, accepted Christ at the crusade. After counseling, he left with excited urgency.

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Speaking in Krio, Sierra Leone's form of pidgin-English, he told a local missionary, "Ah get dis new life dae na Brookfields utter nite. Jesus done come pe me heart, Now ah de go to me people for gee dem new life."

For the first time in the memory of local Christians, an anti-Christian tract, published by Islamic missionaries, appeared. Entitled "Five Things You Should Know About Jesus," the tract cited Bible verses, Christian missionaries describe as "grossly out of context," in an attempt to prove that Jesus Christ was not the son of God, did not die on the cross, did not rise from the dead and has no saving power.

"Muslims will not oppose Christianity as long as it is as lukewarm as it has been in Sierra Leone," commented a government official. "They will grow antagonistic if they think it will make a great difference. This crusade has made impact."

Hanks, who received much of his early training assisting in Billy Graham crusades around the world, credits the crusade's success to a year of preparation by local Christians. The 29-year-old president of International Evangelism Association, Fort Worth, has traveled in 64 countries. Pre-crusade planning in Freetown, he said, ranks among the best of any overseas interfaith crusade he has preached.

The final 12 weeks of preparation included a deeper life campaign to inspire church members, training of pastors and laymen and nine weeks of mandatory training for counselors to deal with persons making decisions.

Eight weeks of follow-up in 22 centers around Freetown will incorporate materials prepared by Hanks. He remained for a week after the crusade to personally lead a seminar on "hardcore Christian discipleship" which he teaches regularly in the States.

"Christ came to make disciples, not just converts," explains Hanks, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth. "We have to get converts to continue developing disciples, but we have to remember that Jesus spent more time growing disciples than seeking converts."

Excited Christian leaders in Freetown say the groundwork laid by the crusade, its side meetings and the follow-up will revitalize "spiritual dryrot in formal, inbred Christian churches" in the area and accelerate spiritual renewal into the outcountry.

In side meetings alone (including 40 secondary schools, a number of churches, prisons, factories and several surrounding villages), crusade team members reported several thousand decisions not counted in crusade totals. They include four men on death row in Freetown's prison who accepted Christ the day before they were hanged.

The Minnesota Bible Fellowship helped pave the way into the schools by providing Christian books for their libraries and distributed 3,000 free books in the Freetown area.

Blessitt, a Southern Baptist, also played an integral--though unexpected--role in preparing for the crusade. About a year before it began, he arrived by boat, unannounced, with an index finger pointed heavenward, a landrover and a cross.

Preaching one way through Jesus, he shouldered his now famous cross and followed the landrover up and down the tiny nation's roads, including torturous winding roads of the primitive outcountry. Behind him he left Jesus stickers, one way with Jesus tee shirts, his "Jesus yell" and, according to missionaries, excited young converts for them to work with in the crusade preparation.

"Blessitt came just at the right moment," said Johannes Hagen, a European Baptist Mission Society missionary and chairman of New Life for All. (Sierra Leone has no Southern Baptist missionaries.) "But then everything that has happened has prepared us for great spiritual results, especially Billie Hanks' emphasis on Christian discipleship training as an inseparable part of evangelism."

• **Hull Speaks at Faith and  
Message Fellowship Clinic**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--The Baptist Faith and Message statement was a good one for Baptists in 1963, "but I hope Baptists will someday honor that statement" by writing one that is "better" and "deeper," William E. Hull of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said during a Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship national bus clinic here.

"I hope I made some contributions to its writing, and I subscribe to every bit of it. I would sign at top and bottom and in both margins," the Southern Seminary provost, dean of the school of theology and professor of New Testament interpretation, said.

Hull's remarks were made near the conclusion of an address titled, "The Uniqueness of the Bible." A frequent target of the fellowship since he preached a sermon titled, "Shall We Call the Bible Infallible?" (later published in the Baptist Program), Hull was invited to present his views of the scriptures before the first nationally-sponsored activity of the group.

At the conclusion of the address, William Powell, editor of the Southern Baptist Journal, asked Hull to answer a simple "yes" or "no" to nine questions. They were: (1) Was Adam the first man? (2) Did God make Eve from the rib or some other part of Adam's body? (3) Was Eve the first woman to give birth to another human being? (4) Did some large fish swallow Jonah? (5) Did Jonah stay in the belly of that large fish for about three days and nights? (6) Is the average Bible infallible? (7) Are there a discrediting number of scribal or other errors in the average Bible in the average home? (8) How can the average Christian determine what parts of the Bible are truth and what parts are error? (9) Will the average adult who has not heard about Jesus go to hell when he dies? Powell's questions were asked during a question and answer period following Hull's address.

Hull responded by saying that the questions were in three general categories: the historical nature of the Bible, the dependability of the Bible and judgment.

"When the Bible presents something as history, I would believe it as history," he said. "When the Bible presents something in symbolic language, I will accept it as symbolic literature and believe the truth to which it speaks."

Hull said he had already talked about the dependability of the Bible on judgment. He recounted the parable of the last judgment and said that it was those who were confident they were the Lord's faithful who were cast out into "utter darkness." Those who made no claim of being the Lord's faithful were those received, Hull said.

"I am going to leave man's judgment to God," Hull concluded.

Adrian Rogers, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tenn., in an address following Hull's said he believed the Bible was infallible because the Bible was "the Word of God. That means that God breathes the words and God does not have halitosis," Rogers said.

"His breath is pure. If you admit there is just one error in the Bible, there is no stopping place," he asserted.

"The Bible never claims the writers of scripture were inspired," Rogers said. "The Bible says the scriptures were inspired."

Hull, in his address, said a lot has happened since 1963--energy crisis, Watts, Kent State, ecology crisis, Vietnam. After quoting John 16:12, the theology school dean said, "We are specifically taught that the Holy Spirit will lead us to new growth and understanding of the Bible as we are able to bear it.

"The problem is not a lack of knowledge," he asserted. "The problem is a lack of ability to bear the truth." Hull said Christians now realize there is "no way to square slavery with the Sermon on the Mount, but it took almost 2,000 years and a cruel Civil War before we were able to bear the truth that no human being has a right to own another human being.

"We are not yet able to bear all of the teachings of God's Word on poverty, war, deceit, prejudice," he asserted.

Earlier, Hull recounted the problems faced by what he called an "average Baptist going to buy a Bible."

"What makes up the Bible, its contents, is the first problem our average Baptist faces," Hull said. He recounted how the Roman Catholic church viewed the Apocrypha (a group of 12-15 writings in the 400 years between the closing of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament) as authoritative and binding scripture. The Reformed Tradition, on the other hand, does not use these writings at all, he said. However, for 200 years after the King James Version of the Bible was published, the Apocrypha writings were included, he pointed out.

The second problem is "what was actually written." Hull said that some versions of the Bible have the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery at the beginning of John 8.

"Some Bibles have the story in brackets. Some have it down in a footnote, some in the back of the book of John. Some do not have it at all," he observed.

"And the doxology of the Lord's Prayer is in some editions and not in others.

"And into what English words do we translate the Bible," Hull asked. An amplified Bible like the Living Bible has 80 per cent more words than the King James Version, he pointed out.

Hull reminded the listeners of the fury created by the Revised Standard Version of the Bible when "virgin" was translated "young woman."

"One of my favorite preaching themes is reconciliation," Hull said. "But when I read one version, the word 'reconciliation' was not there at all. It read 'Christ made us his friend.'

"The final problem faced by average Baptists is interpretation," Hull said. "An average Baptist will find passages dealing with the Sabbath but he will see most Christians meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week. The reader will find some who believe in the practice of speaking in tongues and some who do not.

"And what will he do with the very poor teachings about washing feet? Very few practice that scriptural teaching any longer.

"If there is confusion over interpreting the plain verses of the Bible, what can we expect of the difficult ones," he asked.

Hull then asked his audience if the problems he mentioned were really problems. Answering his own question, the seminary dean said they were only by-products of the central claim of the Bible, that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

"God came to man," Hull said. "He accommodated himself to man's limits. He did not impose some language on man. He used man's Hebrew, his Aramaic, or his Greek. God gave his followers the Word and let the Word become part of their lives.

"God deposited His treasure in earthen vessels that the transcendent truth might belong to him," Hull said.

"When the average Baptist captures the truth," Hull continued, "he can pay the price of study to understand the best available version. He knows he misunderstands even the daily newspaper. A layman who hears the Word of God in one of your sermons knows he has encountered God, even if we preachers make mistakes in the sermon.

"The uniqueness is that God put his transcendent truth in a book written by humans," Hull declared.

Baptist Plans Religious  
Development of New Town

By Tim Nicholas  
for Baptist Press

James O. Dorriety is chaplain of a town that isn't there yet.

As director of religious affairs for Scott Hudgens Enterprises, a multi-faceted land and development corporation, the Southern Baptist minister's job includes religious development of the planned city of Shenandoah, which will be 35 miles south of Atlanta.

By contacting existing churches in the area and scheduling conferences with experts in the field of human needs, Dorriety is planning the religious needs of an estimated 70,000 persons expected by 1990.

Dorriety is also chaplain on call for all business arms of Hudgens Enterprises. He oversees weekly chapel services at the company's mortgage and realty office and at the developing Shannon condominium properties and shopping mall near Union City, Ga.

Endorsed by the Southern Baptist Convention Chaplain's Commission, Dorriety is counselor for both the corporate and industrial areas of Hudgens Enterprises. He does more actual counseling in industrial than in corporate offices because frustrations in corporate offices are hidden, he says.

"But I'm often asked to share a cup of coffee with someone who actually wants to talk about something important," Dorriety says.

Office hopping among the departments of the various Hudgens companies takes some of Dorriety's time, but he feels it's necessary to establish relationships. Most people seem glad to see the tall, wide-shouldered man as he moves down the long halls of the Hudgens companies, drawing shopkeepers and executives alike into conversation.

Visitors to Dorriety's own office receive a personalized business card that won't fit into their pockets. It's a record album recorded at a dinner for Dorriety, that includes anecdotes about his rural Alabama childhood.

But Dorriety becomes more serious as he tells how he became a Christian after a summer of shortchange artistry at a drive-in restaurant.

He met his wife in church and (though not necessarily in this order) decided to go into the ministry.

Declining a ministerial exemption in World War II, Dorriety served as a judo instructor for recruits; he was recalled into the Korean Conflict. Later he was pastor of several churches before accepting Scott Hudgens' offer to develop the religious environment for Hudgens' various enterprises.

Hudgens, a 50-year-old financier and longtime friend of Dorriety, believes that church and ministry are integral to the structure of a planned city.

That is why, even though the federal loan which is making the planned city possible only requires a developer to include education, employment, health, cultural and recreational opportunities, Hudgens plans an environment that will include religion.

Tracts of land, five to 15 acres per plot, are centrally located in each of the 11 villages to be built in Shenandoah and will be sold to individual denominations for separate church fellowships. Baptist and Methodist groups already are considering plots.

Meanwhile Dorriety lives in one of the subdivisions already completed. His wife Vonzeal leads a weekly Bible study for the women in the other condominiums, and Dorriety is available for counseling in family matters or in manager-tenant disputes.

Though a member of First Baptist Church of Jonesboro, Dorriety is seldom there; he speaks at local churches, civic clubs, and other community organizations.

Now that he's not in a pastoral situation, Dorriety realizes that, aside from liabilities such as middle of the night calls and exasperating budget matters, the pastorate has certain benefits.

"I miss the sense of belonging to a family," he says. "In the pastorate, people were interested if I was sick." He conceded too that birthdays were more exciting when he was a pastor.

"With the business community, meetings are all in the day. Most counseling can be done in daylight hours. In the pastorate I never felt I was through with a day's work and often felt guilty about even taking a vacation," says Dorriety.

His philosophy for new town religion planning hasn't quite jelled yet, but he is culling information, opinion and feelings. "I have a vision of taking the church in one hand and industry in the other and getting them together in the total community."

As the whole man must be ministered to, so must the whole community. Dorriety has a chance to put that theory into practice.

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers.