

May 1, 1974

**'God Uses Blindness,'
Says Sightless Musician**

By Orville Scott
for Baptist Press

His hands dropped to the keys like a falcon on target.

Words and music burst forth like a cooling rain in the midsummer:

"...In the dingy, oppressive ghetto, Oh, what a hopeless place...Yet some where in the midst of stinking, ruinous tenements a lone robin sings, a baby cries, a flower blooms."

Like so many of Ken Medema's creations, the song was spontaneous, unrehearsed. It was an outpouring of the blind musician's deep inner feeling for people "who need Jesus."

Medema, whom acquaintances claim can see clearer than the majority of people with 20-20 vision, finds himself at 30 years of age one of the country's most sought-after Christian musicians, booked solid on weekends through the middle of next year.

As a youngster, Medema knew the anger and frustration that comes from feeling handcuffed to a world of darkness.

Fortunately, Medema's parents had the courage and wisdom to let their blind son climb trees and even dare to ride a bicycle like sighted youngsters.

By listening to tape recordings and reading music in Braille, he learned to play the piano. He would feel the raised notes with one hand and play with the other.

He grew up in the Dutch Reformed Church, though not dedicated to it. By the time he enrolled in college, the talented youngster had drifted away.

During his senior year of college, Medema found himself frantically looking for some kind of security. "The harder I worked, the harder I searched," he recalls.

Recognized for his musical ability, he dreamed of becoming a concert pianist.

"It was exciting to think about giving a solo performance for an audience that was just itching to hear me."

Medema thinks his personal "Fork in the Road" came when he met Jane Smith, daughter of Truitt Smith, a Baptist pastor from Texas.

He considered himself an enlightened fellow who didn't need religion, but he attended church with her and was asked to solo.

For the talented young musician, it was "an ego trip," but through Jane and her family, he eventually found the clue to what was missing in his life. The result was that Medema told God "for whatever my life is worth, it is yours."

Ken and Jane were married following graduation, and he began serving as a music therapist with retarded children in Indiana.

"I began to feel the Lord calling me to do something unique with my music," Medema said.

He had trained as a classical musician, but the possibilities in "rock" music intrigued him.

In his work as a music therapist, he had found that people with emotional and mental disturbances will open up to a song.

His tender song, "Treasures," was written for a mentally retarded third-grader who was terribly withdrawn. The song begins:

"One of the loveliest treasures of spring is a flower, But spring's very loveliest treasure is you..."

The youngsters in Medema's class helped put the song together, and it was given to the young girl, the first thing she'd ever had to call her own.

When the Medemas moved to the Newark, N.J., area in 1969, he began working with problem teenagers, youth with narcotics abuse and other social problems.

The young musician led them to write, direct and produce a rock musical for the stage, complete with props. As a result, "they began to trust an adult and to find out it wasn't so bad to work with a grown-up after all."

The blind musician started writing songs about his Lord with a contemporary beat. One Baptist musician described his style recently as "white soul!"

"The songs just started coming to me," he recalled. "The Lord was saying, 'This is a gift I'm giving you.'"

Soon his talent was in demand by churches throughout the New Jersey area and when the work spread to Texas, he was asked to sing at the Texas Baptist Woman's Missionary Union Houseparty. That led to a recording session with Word Records of Waco and the album "Fork in the Road."

A second album, entitled "Sonshine," is scheduled for release this spring.

The wave of concert demands by churches eventually compelled Medema to give up his work as a music therapist. He is booked solid on weekends through the middle of next year.

Medema's songs are in the language of here and now, often using the "rock" rhythm, but full of life's deepest meanings.

In songs such as "Don't Play the Game" and "Running Away," Medema pleads with people to come out from behind their artificial masks and communicate in Christian love:

"Everybody is running all the time, And they never stop to hear people crying lonely tears..."

In retrospect, Medema said, "It's as if I'd been sitting back watching things happen in my life which has been taken out of my hands. Since I became a Christian, life has become a joyful experience.

He insists, "God allowed me to be blind so he could use me better." (BP)

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(BP) Photo mailed to Baptist state papers

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May 1, 1974

Lively Discussions Face
Otherwise Quiet SBC

DALLAS (BP)--Although the annual Southern Baptist Convention meeting here, June 11-13, is expected to experience no major eruptions, messengers to the sessions can look forward to some lively discussion on an issue or two.

Among motions confronting the convention will probably be one by Frank Minton, a Dayton, Ohio pastor, asking that the Home Mission Board's division of evangelism be converted into a separate agency, a Commission on Evangelism.

Arthur Rutledge, the Home Mission Board's executive director, has responded that the board is in fact a board of missions and evangelism and that a change of name to National Missions and Evangelism Board would achieve Minton's purpose of giving evangelism greater exposure in the denomination.

Rutledge says he does not oppose a review of the matter but points to a conclusion in the recently completed study of the convention by the "Committee of 15" that evangelism development can best be implemented in its present setting with the Home Mission Board.

Minton says his proposal has grass roots support and would be the best approach to increasing evangelism's exposure.

Under convention bylaws a decision to establish a new agency must be approved by a majority vote of messengers at two successive conventions.

Another focal point of interest is expected to be a series of recommendations the SBC's Christian Life Commission will bring on women's rights, race relations, integrity in government and economic life.

The Christian Life Commission's recommendations will call for specific actions from messengers, rather than resolutions or a report to be received.

Part of the recommendation on women calls for the convention to amend its Bylaw 7 to "move toward more equitable representation" by stipulating that women make up one-fifth of the total elected members of SBC boards, agencies and committees by no later than 1980.

Bylaw 7, in fact, will be under scrutiny from more than one direction. The SBC's Executive Committee will also recommend its amendment to "provide a more precise definition of the 'ordained' and 'layman' provision. . ."

Presently, the bylaw states that "all convention committees, boards and commissions shall include both ordained and lay persons as members. . ."

The proposed amendment would alter "ordained" to read "pastors or other full-time church or denominational employees" and "lay persons" to read "those who are not pastors or full-time church or denominational employees."

Purpose of the recommendation, explains Porter Routh, executive secretary-treasurer of the Executive Committee, "is to more carefully preserve the viewpoint of the persons who sit in the pew when naming trustees to our convention agency boards."

Routh said that pastors and full-time religious workers, whether ordained or not, would tend to have the same perspective on issues. And he said, "you might have a person who was ordained early in life but had left the pastorate and spent 20 years in secular work. That person would tend to look at things more from the standpoint of a layman," Routh said, "and should be categorized as such when under consideration for election to a board of trustees."

One, and probably two, recommendations which emanated from the Executive Committee's Committee of 15 study group will face convention messengers.

One involves authorizing the convention's new president to appoint a seven-person committee to study the Executive Committee in the same manner the Committee of 15 studied the convention agencies.

Last February, the Executive Committee modified a Committee of 15 request for a two-year SBC "strategy" review of total convention missions efforts by appointing a nine-person committee to work out a recommendation to challenge Southern Baptists in missionary support for the next quarter-century.

That report, if approved at the Executive Committee's June 10 meeting in Dallas, will be presented to the SBC meeting for action later in the week.

Three other of the Committee of 15's recommendations, not acted on in February, will also be considered by the Executive Committee on June 10.

They are: (1) to allow the Southern Baptist Foundation to advertise its services in SBC periodicals, (2) to endorse another major organizational structure study of SBC agencies around 1980, (3) to discharge the Committee of 15, which completed a four-year study of convention structure in February.

Ratification of Executive Committee action on these points may or may not be asked for at the SBC meeting later in the week, depending on what action the committee takes.

In other action, trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, will ask messengers to approve establishment of a Ministry Training Center, to be called the Boyce Bible School, to operate within the seminary's charter as a non-degree school for pastors with little or no seminary training.

The proposal, already approved by the Executive Committee, would operate within the seminary's regular budget and expand its existing non-degree program.

The Christian Life Commission recommendation on women also urges Baptists to "reaffirm our commitment to the Bible's teaching that every individual has infinite worth and that, in Christ, there is neither male nor female, and that we endeavor to communicate these basic truths through Christian education, by precept and example in church and at home."

The recommendation states further "that we work to develop greater sensitivity to both overt and covert discrimination against women. . . and that our churches and our denominational agencies bear witness to the rest of society by rejecting discrimination against women in job placement, by providing equal pay for equal work and by electing women to positions of leadership for which God's gifts and the Holy Spirit's calling equip them."

Besides recommendations on women, integrity in government and economic life, the Christian Life Commission also speaks out on race relations, recommending that Southern Baptist agencies "seek within their program assignments and employment practices to communicate the conviction that racism is theologically untenable, politically destructive and fatally dehumanizing. . ."

It further urges that Baptists "work earnestly for racial justice in public education, employment, health care, housing, consumer concerns and citizen participation in the political process," and that "we renew efforts toward cooperation between those who differ racially, ethnically or culturally. . ."

Other items for action include Executive Committee recommendations that the convention change program statements of the Home and Foreign Mission Boards to allow the Home Mission Board to transfer its work in Panama to the Foreign Mission Board, that approval be granted for a change in the Sunday School Board's formula for contribution to the convention operating budget and that Bylaw 8 be amended to add a representative of Woman's Missionary Union to the convention's Public Affairs Committee.

Messengers will also be asked to approve a 1974-75 Cooperative Program unified budget of \$40 million, including \$36 million operating budget for SBC agencies, \$3 million "challenge budget" and \$1 million capital needs budget.

Also up for approval will be a \$715,000 convention operating budget, which includes the budget of the SBC Executive Committee with offices in Nashville, expenses for the annual SBC meeting, special committee expenses, legal and auditing fees and contributions to the Baptist World Alliance and Religion in American Life.

The Executive Committee will recommend that messengers endorse the launching of a long-range planning program for the Southern Baptist impact in the 1980s and develop plans in 1974 for a Declaration of Cooperation to challenge Southern Baptist churches, through their state conventions, to make a commitment of \$150 million through the Cooperative Program for 1975, with the anticipation these funds will be received in 1976. The SBC Stewardship Commission would implement the program, if approved.

A new convention president will be elected to succeed Owen Cooper, a layman from Yazoo City, Miss., who is not eligible for re-election since he is completing his second year in that office.

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25 US-2ers Appointed
By Home Mission Board

5/1/74

ATLANTA (BP)--The Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB) has appointed 25 recent college graduates to its two-year US-2 mission program.

New appointees for US-2 service include a student worker in Lawrence, Kan., a resort worker at the Grand Canyon, three persons to work in trailer parks and a director for a high school volunteer recruitment program.

Debbie Patterson of San Angelo, Tex., will begin work in the fall directing the HMB's Sojourner program which provides mission opportunities to high school students and graduates. She replaces Clay Price, a former US-2er, who began the program during a one year test period for the board.

Besides Miss Patterson, 10 other young people will be assigned through the special mission ministries department to work in resort and student missions. Ben Broome of Hawkinsville, Ga., will do student work with the University of Kansas at Lawrence; John Carrigan of Portsmouth, Va., will work at Stanford University at San Jose, Calif.; Cathy Tumlin of Atlanta, Ga., will be at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff; and Nathaniel Milton of Pochontas, Miss., and Steve Wilson of Duncan, Okla., will do student work in Baltimore, Md., and Billings, Mont., respectively.

In resort ministry work will be Allen Lukens of Nerrin, Ill., who will work at Gatlinburg, Tenn., and Jim McLaughlin of Dallas, Tex., who will work at the Grand Canyon in Arizona.

Three others will work out of state Baptist offices in resort work. Bob Swearingen of Birmingham, Ala., Ann Williams of Redwood City, Calif., and Phil Cockrell of Limon, Colo., will work in Illinois, Arkansas and South Carolina, respectively.

Working for the department of Christian social ministries will be two couples and one single woman. James and Viola Palmer, natives of Macon, Ga., and Sulphur Springs, Tex., will work at the Baptist Center in Phoenix, Ariz.; Terry and Virginia Haynes, natives of Lumberton, N. C., and Aiken, S. C., will work in Harrisburg, Pa.; and Beverly Gray of Sikeston, Mo., will work in the Baptist Center in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Three US-2ers will work in trailer parks for the HMB's church extension department and a couple, David and Beverly Haynes of Anniston, Ala., will do church extension work in northern Illinois. The three assigned to trailer parks are Ralph and Jan (Brazzell) Murphy of Tuscaloosa, Ala., and Huntsville, Ala., who will work around Columbia, S. C., and Jeannette Williams of Monroeville, La., will work in Shelby County, Ala.

The board's language missions department will get workers with the Indians, Spanish and seamen's ministries. David Fouche of Greenville, S. C., will work with the seamen's ministry at Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; and Stan Mitchell of Gainesville, Fla., will work with the Indians at Central Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, Okla. Mike and Maggy Manzullo, natives of New Orleans, La., and Puerto Rico, will work among the Spanish-speaking people for the Northwest Baptist Convention.

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