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An Analysis

Hungarian-American Views
Baptist Work in Hungary

By Bela Udvarnoki
For Baptist Press

Bela Udvarnoki, president of the Hungarian Baptist Convention of America, wrote this first person account for Baptist Press of Baptist work in Hungary, following a recent visit to that country.

Udvarnoki is professor emeritus of Chowan College, Murfreesboro, N.C., a Baptist school.

"As official guests of the Hungarian Baptist Convention, Mrs. Udvarnoki and I visited Hungary May 16- June 18. 'Official guests' means that the invitation was approved by the Office of Church Affairs. It also meant that we were free to visit as many places as we wanted to and were allowed to preach in any church we desired.

"In the 33 days in Hungary we were able to visit 17 Baptist churches in many different parts of Hungary, and I had the opportunity to preach 23 times.

"Since I am a Hungarian, I had no need of interpreters. I had direct contact with the people in and out of the pulpit. I tried to imagine myself in their place--and see their life and problems from their point of view.

"This attitude does not mean that I simply echo their thinking or expressions. Looking at them with an American point of view it is impossible to understand their problems and their approach and handling the questions arising from their situation.

"The spiritual life in the Baptist churches is praiseworthy and for the future encouraging. That is my general impression.

"1.--Are the Baptist churches really Baptist in Hungary? The question is by what criterion we define Baptist churches. If the criteria are 'autonomy' and 'independence,' then one can say there are no 'Baptist' churches in the so-called 'Socialist' lands, with the exception of the illegal Evangelical Baptist Churches in Russia. But if the standard of judgment is adherence to the teaching of the Scripture (including immersion) faithfulness to the church, prayer life and consciousness of Christian discipleship, then those churches are Baptist at their best.

"Baptist churches are under strict although invisible and unpalpable control. The churches have no absolute right to determine who will be their pastor. There is no 'Sunday School' and there are no 'revival' or 'evangelistic' meetings. The president of the Baptist convention is silently and previously approved by the government authorities and openly voted for by the convention. He observes the instructions he receives from the secular authorities. Preachers and churches know they have to follow the president's decisions.

"This system by no means can be conceived of as free. But it is the only way the work may be maintained in Hungary. It works for the time being. Churches are free under this dispensation to meet for worship any time. And they meet regularly three times a week.

"2.--Prayer life--Before the Sunday morning worship service there is a half-an-hour prayer meeting in every church. At one church I visited at the beginning of the prayer meeting there were about 200 people present. The church has 350 members. By the time of the worship service the 'auditorium' was filled with 400 worshippers.

"I listened to the fervent prayers of those Baptists. My feeling was: these people have direct, personal contact with the Lord! No earthly power can suppress them.

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"A beautiful prayer-scene was in one church, the 'dedication' of two infants by two young couples. The parents stood at the pulpit facing the congregation and they themselves prayed audibly for their children! One of the young mothers was so overwhelmed by emotion she broke down sobbing. The pastor finished the prayer, and the members of the congregation dried their tears!

"3.--We may mistakenly feel sorry or concerned for the Baptists in Hungary for not being able to organize Sunday Schools and arrange 'revival meetings.' They do not need our sympathy. The teaching of the Bible is still going on effectively in Bible Hours and in the home.

"How effective is the 'religious education' in 'Socialist' lands? It is demonstrated by the composition of the congregations. My observation was that half the people were young... Their constant attendance in church meetings is perhaps the best proof of the good result of their Bible teaching.

"Similar warning must be sounded to those who lament the lack of evangelistic meetings. First of all, the worship services are evangelistic in their nature. Then, instead of open revival meetings, they by necessity practice the best method, the New Testament method: personal evangelism. Personal evangelism is a wonderful double channeled power house. Any one who is witnessing is revived first! The result is visible.

"4.--One of the proofs of the healthy spiritual life of the Hungarian Baptist churches is their singing and the enthusiastic participation of the young people in choral work. There are no large churches in Hungary. But every church over 50 or 60 members has a choir of 20 or 30 singers. Larger churches over 150 or 200 members have choirs of 50 or 60 voices. These choirs are well trained. The Central Baptist Choir of Budapest, a selected choir out of 18 church choirs attended the European Baptist Congress in Zurich last year and it is invited to sing at the Baptist World Congress next year in Stockholm, Sweden. None of these good choirs would exist without the cultural and spiritual hunger of the young people.

"Church attendance and discipline are other signs of the healthy state of the Hungarian Baptist churches. In every church the average attendance is higher than the number of the enlisted members. The presence of children, visitors and non-member friends makes up the difference. There is no classified membership such as 'inactive' or 'non resident'.

"It is not prestigious in Hungary to be on the church roll. The alienated, the unconcerned person sees to it quickly that his name is taken off the registry.

"Without the burden of inactive, never present 'members,' the churches feel unhindered to turn their attention to spiritual matters.

"5.--There are a few curious, unexpected by-products of the Marxist anti-religious attitude. By its antagonistic pressure (there is no open persecution), it creates more determined believers. Baptists are very much conscious of their dependence on the Lord. When they attend the churches in spite of the disfavoring attitude of those on whom their bread-earning depends, then they must have deep and abiding convictions about the superiority of the objects of their faith.

"Another unexpected fact in Hungary is that the state, committed to anti-religious philosophy, actually supports the old, state churches, Roman Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans, by giving a small monthly amount (\$30 or \$40) to supplement the ministers' salaries.

Baptists never asked financial aid from the government, but those denominations which expected and accepted it for hundreds of years found themselves woefully weak when the big change came to walk without the crutches supplied by the state. Those churches would have collapsed but the atheistic state came to their rescue. I felt that Baptists are respected for their constant standing not to participate in government aid.

"Their pseudo-atheists are another product. There are many 'secret disciples' in Hungary. Openly they deny every kind of religion, deny even God, but secretly they confess: they too are believers! Now just which is a more unpleasant phenomenon: pseudo-Christianity in western democracies or pseudo-atheism in eastern socialist countries? It is a good question to ponder over..." (BP)



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July 12, 1974

Two Churches Burn; One
Spared in Ky. Association

CENTRAL CITY, Ky. (BP)--Two Muhlenburg Baptist Association churches were burned to the ground and a third spared when a suspected arsonist was scared off by police, within a five-day period here.

Flames raced through Cedar Grove Baptist Church, located seven miles west of here, with losses to structure and contents estimated at \$375,000, according to Gerald Jones Jr., the church's pastor. The building underwent extensive remodeling two years ago, members reported.

Nelson Creek Baptist Church, also totally destroyed, was in the process of completing an addition to the building when the fire struck. Members had hoped to move into the new wing this month, Mrs. Robert Grass, the pastor's wife, said.

A new baptistry, piano and organ were also recently installed in the destroyed sanctuary, two miles east of Central City. The pastor estimated damage at \$150,000.

The fires broke out within minutes of each other and the buildings were beyond saving when firefighters arrived.

A 17 year-old boy was detained by the Muhlenburg County sheriff for questioning in connection with the fires, prior to the unsuccessful third attempt of suspected arson.

A third church in the Muhlenburg Association, First Baptist Church of Greenville, Ky., was apparently spared the same fate when police scared off a suspected arsonist a few days later.

Gasoline-soaked rags had been placed around the church's front door and gasoline cans were found at the scene. David Gardner is pastor of the Greenville church.

Police would not comment on the possibility that the same person was involved in all three incidents, sources said.

Other pastors in the area were notified by association superintendent Allen Black of possible danger to their churches after initial reports of the fire at Nelson Creek were confirmed.

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Youth Dies Before He Can
Give Speech on Living

7/12/74

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (BP)--Hal Ingraham, 17, was very much alive and prepared the morning of the day he was to give an address expressing the enjoyment he found living because of his belief in Jesus Christ.

The address, -- worked out to the last comma -- titled, "Alive and Unique," was never given by Hal to its intended audience, the State Speaker's Tournament of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

He died earlier that day when the tractor he was driving overturned, pinning him underneath.

Hal was to have represented Belmont Heights Baptist Church, Nashville; the Nashville Baptist Association and the convention Central Region in the tournament, held in early July.

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The son of Middle Tennessee Attorney and Mrs. Frank C. Ingraham, the youth began his manuscript:

"I am alive! For this I am deeply grateful because four different times during the first year of my life I was presumed dead." He then asked two questions:

"Why am I alive?"

"What's unique about man today?"

For young Ingraham being alive and man's uniqueness were answered in Jesus Christ and God's love for man.

"...God's purpose from the very beginning has been for man to be His close companion . . .," Hal wrote.

"This relationship can only be completed through our trust in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Christ had to pay a terrible price for us in order that we might be able to regain contact with God. That's how great God's love is for us."

The reason we are alive today? "...to know and share the good news about Jesus Christ."

On uniqueness? - "You see, as Christians we already have an identity in Christ."

Hal would have been a senior at Battle Ground Academy, Franklin, and had plans for becoming an evangelist. Active in Belmont Heights Church youth activities where he was a member, Hal viewed his participation in the speaker's tournament as "experience for my future work in the ministry."

His text, printed by the Baptist and Reflector, Nashville, Tenn., was prefaced: "Hal will live on in the hearts of many who loved him and were blessed by his dedicated happy spirit."

Amen and Amen.

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Disney Musician To Direct
World Premiere of Musical

7/12/74

PORTLAND, Ore. (BP)--Disney World in Orlando, Fla., and Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., will have a mutual representative present and starring when the 8th Baptist Youth World Conference opens in the Portland Memorial Coliseum on Wednesday evening, July 31, 1974. The conference will run through August 4, with young people from more than 40 nations attending.

Directing the music -- singing and orchestra -- for the world premiere of "The Common Cup," a Christian musical, will be Bob Burroughs, director of "Kids of the Kingdom," musical show at Disney World. Burroughs also directs the Hear and Now Singers from the Baptist university in Birmingham, where he is Samford's Composer in Residence.

The Hear and Now Singers will make up a large part of the cast for "The Common Cup," which is set in London and depicts the search of a small, orphaned boy for love and friends in that city's streets and alleys.

Benji -- orphan, shoeshine boy is played by Doug Barnes, 12, from Garland, Tex., who observers say, turns in a "superb" performance.

The musical interprets the conference theme, "Christ--Our Challenge to Live."

"Common Cup's" musical score was written by Bill Cates, a Nashville, Tenn. composer, who has worked with the Up with People cast. His wife, Linda, a former lead soloist for Up with People, has a leading role in "The Common Cup." The book and lyrics for the musical were written by Ed Seabough, of Atlanta, Ga., who shares directing duties with Robert Thrift, minister to students for University Baptist Church in Austin, Tex. The Cates and Seabough are employed by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board.

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Musical numbers will be staged by Kathy Pickle, a choreographer who formerly danced with the June Taylor Dancers and with the "Disney on Parade" tour. Mrs. Pickle, whose husband, George, is Baptist student director for the University of California and the University of California at Los Angeles, has danced with the Disney troupe in the Portland Coliseum and is now back with a religious theme.

Production will be supervised by Ray Sykes, technical director of Merrimack College Theater in St. Louis, Mo. Scenery design is by Jim Hurt of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board art department in Atlanta.

Musical direction is under Burroughs and Cates, with orchestration responsibilities falling to Burroughs and Jim Ailor, a Samford University student.

Lighting design duties fell to Gary Shepard, of Sandia Corporation in Albuquerque, N.M. Shepard is the lighting designer for the New Mexico Ballet Company.

The cast in order of appearance, includes:

Narrator--Mike Fawcett, a student at Belmont College in Nashville; Pop Pomery--played by Fes Robertson, of the Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville; Alan--Randy Moore of Samford; Laurie--Connie Free, Samford; Angie--Kay DeKalb, Samford; Sarah -Mrs. Cates of Nashville; Benji--young Barnes; Man--Tom Albright, Marie--Elaine Bruce, Brian--Jerry Eason, all of Samford.

Singers (chorus) include Lauryn Brassell, Emily Hayes and Kim Bowen, all of Samford; also, Kenny Seabough of Odessa, Mo., Marie and Robert Doctrie of Jacksonville (Ala.) State University.

Orchestra members for the musical will be Jim Ailor, Bill Moody, Chris Fowler, Don Coggans, Tom Hannaford, Ken Kirby and Randy Wright all of Samford; also, Bob Swearingen of Rockford, Ill.